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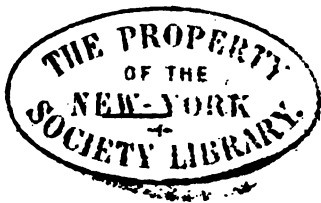
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HUNTED DOWN.

A MYSTERY SOLVED.



BY

MAX HILLARY,

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AUTHOR OF 'ONCE FOR ALL.'

cc

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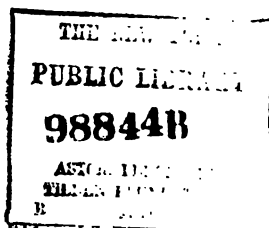
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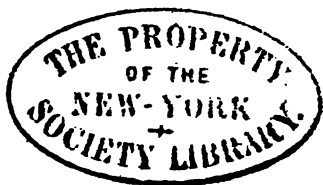
PREFACE.

PERHAPS the worst way to win credence for a story is to demand it; and when writers begin by saying that probably the reader may doubt the probability of their tale, and then vouch for the facts which do not vouch for themselves, it is the best means of putting incredulous readers upon their guard, and of insuring doubt where possibly the story might have met with belief. Notwithstanding my knowledge of these facts, I am fain to begin with the explanation that this is a true story, and that, whether it is believed or not, it has the merit of being a simple transcript from events which were written large in my life. No doubt I am making a great demand upon the faith of my readers. Still the explanation is only fair to them, for there ought to be perfect candor between a writer, who is a sort of trustee of words, and his reader, who ought to be, but very seldom is, the beneficiary.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
CHAPTER I.	9
On the Short List of the Explosives Insurance Co., Limited —Invitations to Dine—Some Amusing Interviews—The First Mystery.	
CHAPTER II.	16
A Garden Party—The Bestowal of Many Courtesies—Love at First Sight—Was She Mad? Or Was I Mad?—In a Lunatic Asylum.	
CHAPTER III.	34
Messrs. Sorrenson and Teal—New Encouragement—My Curious Mission—Chance Stood my Friend or Proved my Enemy.	
CHAPTER IV.	46
A Strange Encounter—A Look of Surprise and Recognition —A New Phase of Mystery—When I Recovered She was Gone.	
CHAPTER V.	57
Setting Out on my Search—Fruitless Inquiries—An Incor- rigible Joker—Watched and Followed—An Anonymous Letter.	
CHAPTER VI.	67
A Warning—A Short Respite—Sad, Suspicious, Morbidly Fearful—My Curious Night-Adventure—In Great Peril.	
CHAPTER VII.	76
A Fatal Resemblance—A Surprise—Another Warning—In the Presence-Chamber of Death—My Guardian Angel.	

CHAPTER VIII.	98
Back in England—Reporting to Messrs. Sorrenson and Teal —Liable to be Tried for Conspiracy to Kill.	
CHAPTER IX.	109
Thinking Over the Circumstances of my Search—Trying to Unravel the Mystery—A Glimpse of a Familiar Face.	
CHAPTER X.	115
Pleasant Reveries—Some New Discoveries—Born 'Into the Purple' of a Big City Firm—I Went Home, But Not to Sleep.	
CHAPTER XI.	122
Recalling Unpleasant Circumstances — More about the Danescourts — A Confession — A Harmless Joke — A Curious Case.	
CHAPTER XII.	134
Half Happy and Half Sad—A Death—Another Surprise— An Arrest — A Very Serious Matter — The Mystery Deepens.	
CHAPTER XIII.	141
The Discovery of My Anonymous Correspondent—About Nelly Vane—Apparently a Hopeless Task—She Sent Me a Kind Word.	
CHAPTER XIV.	149
A Vague Suspicion—Trying to Find the Vender of Poison— My Three Weeks' Search—A Turn of Luck.	
CHAPTER XV.	162
A Worshiper of Gothic—Alice Danescourt—It Was Then I First Talked of Love, and Not in Vain—The Mystery Solved.	



HUNTED DOWN.

A MYSTERY SOLVED.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE SHORT LIST OF THE EXPLOSIVES INSURANCE CO., LIMITED—INVITATIONS TO DINE—SOME AMUSING INTERVIEWS—THE FIRST MYSTERY.

THOSE who have interested themselves about the social problems of our time must have been struck by the increasing competition which exists for all the employments in which mechanical work is not required, and where some sort of education is a 'condition precedent.' You can read any day, in any paper, that for the office of clerk to some board of guardians, whose salary is to be some £50 a year, 'there were no fewer than 100 candidates.' Advertise that there is a vacancy in the office of secretary to a club, and, although the salary is only £200 a year, you will have among the candidates a score of barristers, a

score of military men, some of them lieutenant-colonels, and fifty or sixty miscellaneous persons besides. Now, I have suffered from the crowds which besiege every half-open door. So much have I suffered, indeed, that I have a dozen times cursed my fate that I was born a gentleman, and that I knew how to read and write, and even count, a little. Had I never had these accomplishments, I might have been content to work with my hands, carry hods up ladders, paint the outside of houses, do something which would keep me busy. As it was, it seemed that education had puffed up my head like a balloon, and my feet could not walk on the common earth. I had a very small patrimony, too, which may have been another misfortune. That puffed up my pride, as the three R's and a smattering besides did my mind. I would not like to say—I never confessed to myself—how long I was occupied in trying to find an occupation. My industry to find a sphere for my industry was enormous. Week after week I answered advertisements. I interviewed hundreds of persons. I was a candidate for this, that, and the other office. I had one or two testimonials—as true as these documents generally are; but they were in rags long before I was in comfort. I was in every quarter

of this great London. I offered myself for almost everything. I advertised myself until my patrimony was a pittance; but the answers were unsatisfactory. I wore out my shoes in walking hither and thither. I was not rich enough to drive. Perhaps I might have had more success if I had driven up to solicit favors in a brougham; and I will admit that even that desperate expedient sometimes entered my head. But nothing came of it. Every door, if not barred with gold, was intricately locked by influence, and I had not the key to fit the wards. I had the advantage, however, of seeing a great deal of human nature, and the more I saw of it, under these aspects, the less I liked it.

At last light seemed to break through the haze of doubt and, if you will believe it, misery, in which I had spent more than a year of my life. I had recklessly, without almost any hope, become a candidate for the office of Secretary to the Explosive Insurance Company, Limited, and it was to my infinite surprise that I was informed by letter one morning that my name was on a selected short list of three out of a very large number of candidates. I was requested to call at the head office of the company in Gresham Street upon a certain day in June, when I was informed the

appointment would be made. This good fortune took my breath away. I had applied, as I said, with only the faintest hope of success. The appointment, which was worth £800 a year, was far too good a one to be given to any person who stood so sorely in need of it as I did. Even now, when this letter had made my hope blaze out brilliantly, I damped it down with the consideration that the appointment would ultimately go to one of the other two gentlemen, whose names were on the short list. But just as a stray flame will burst out, however careful you are to extinguish the fire, so I confess little sparks of illuminating hope came out and cheered me. Why, I thought, if I was doomed to failure, had my name been put upon the list? It was no more impossible that it might be again selected out of three, than that it should have been selected out of the three hundred. Still, as a counterblast, I had to confess to myself that luck and not merit must have placed me where I stood. I was indeed in an ague fit of mind—now hot with hope, now cold with fear.

But hope set me to work. It was still some weeks before the day of the appointment, and I determined, in the mean time, personally to canvass each one of the directors. I set about it in new boots, for I did not like my apparel

to be in too intimate sympathy with the rags of my testimonials. It would be amusing to tell you of all the interviews I had. Now with a very learned but very snuffy Q. C. in the Temple, who was very cautious as to his promises. Again, with a very clever doctor in Harley Street: I know he is a great specialist, the terror of fits or of some such ailment; but he would promise nothing. Another gentleman I called on, with a large person, who had benevolence written in every line of his face and every crease of his waistcoat, but he promised too much. He 'liked my looks, was glad I had called, would certainly vote for me'—but I did not believe him.

I do not mean to waste time in these descriptions, by the way. One interview, however, I must speak of. I called on a Mr. Danescourt, in Grosvenor Crescent, and when I was shown into his presence, I found that he was a young man—a man about my own age. He was certainly good looking, with a massive face, and a strong expression which bit deep into the wax of memory. After a curious start, a little hesitation, and some hot confusion, he received me kindly enough. Regaining, by degrees, his command over himself, which had been lost when first I entered his room, he candidly

informed me that he had not voted for me when my name was put upon the selected list, but said he would do the best he could for me at the meeting in June. He had, he told me, seen the other candidates; but, with good taste, he said nothing to their disparagement. This interview gave my hope wings. Mr. Danescourt, I learned, was a very influential director, and had been chairman of the committee which had been appointed to consider the applications for the post. I learned more of him. He had, I heard, befriended other young men who found the first steps in life difficult enough; and I assumed, erroneously however, that he might himself have struggled into affluence and position, and might have an experienced sympathy for those who are upon the steep slopes of an early ascent. He had, I heard, been kind to one man who had ill requited his kindness—a man who, furthered by his efforts, had gone abroad and taken to the perilous ways of hidden politics, the catacombs of political life. But all this information was vague enough, without at that time the necessary names and dates to make the story authentic. Still I augured much for myself from these waifs of information. Hope will spin the most fragile threads into a stout

rope. I treated myself to the theater that night: there were pits in those days.

It was some days after that, that I received an invitation to dine with Mr. Danescourt at his club in St. James's Street. I was much puzzled by this striking proof of good-will; but, although I wondered, I went. I had to get a new suit of dress clothes for the occasion, but what of that? I almost fingered the first quarter's salary of the secretaryship of the insurance company.

There were four persons there besides myself. One a Mr. Markby. The dinner was a good one—trust a man who has lived principally upon chops for some years to know a good dinner. Conversation went well. I think I took no undue part in it, for I knew that it was the duty of the secretary not to shine much in the presence of a director. Mr. Danescourt was so cordial when I left, that I thought I had confirmed his good opinion of me. Mr. Markby left at the same time that I did, and we walked up St. James's Street together. He too was more than polite to me, gave me his card, asked me to call upon him, and assured me that if he could be of any use to me, he would be pleased. I was not long in acting upon his invitation. I thought that it would be well to cultivate and

propitiate an intimate friend of Mr. Danescourt. I found him on the occasion of my visit still kind and courteous.

I was at a loss to understand what all this meant. Why on earth was it that I, who had had my knuckles importunately but unsuccessfully at every door for a year, should now find so many doors courteously opened to me? Mr. Markby, not content with being kind, insisted on my dining with him. Why? Had I developed some wonderful social gift of which I was myself unconscious? I could trust my vanity to tell me all my merits. No, it could not be that. This was the first mystery which met me.

CHAPTER II.

A GARDEN PARTY—THE BESTOWAL OF MANY COURTESIES—LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT—WAS SHE MAD? OR WAS I MAD?—IN A LUNATIC ASYLUM.

I DINED with Mr. Markby, who was a married man; and his politeness went further than that of Mr. Danescourt, for he asked me to dine at his house, and not at his club. Perhaps the dinner was not so good, but the courtesy was greater. His wife was a pleasant,

almost plethoric, woman—perhaps the feminine of plethoric is *embonpoint*. She was like most people in whom nature has flattened the angles to curves, good humored. Her sister, a much younger woman, with only the pretty promise of amplitude about her, was staying with her, and only we four were at the dinner-table. I said, in the last chapter, that a man who has been ill-fed knows a good dinner. I say now, with equal conviction, that a man who has lived alone, or only with men, is alone able to judge of the infinite charm of woman's society. Intercourse with men may be bracing, but with women it is refining. I enjoyed the dinner at the club, but I enjoyed that little dinner in Wimpole Street far more. I was treated not only with kindness, but consideration. I even thought, but of course I was a fool, that Miss Stewart—that was the name of Mrs. Markby's sister—showed some liking for me. At the same time it is only fair to say, that when I was alone again, I thought that I must be mad and suffering from what Esquirol called the monomania of pride—that I was under the delusion that people admired and courted me; but then against that plausible theory I had the facts, and they staggered me. I had been thinking of the cases of insanity in my family, but the strongest

hereditary tendency could not have convinced me that these two dinners were delusions. Further, Mrs. Markby had been good enough to ask me if I would accompany her and her sister to a garden-party, Mr. Markby was unable to go. It was, oddly enough, a party at a private asylum at Weybridge; but she told me that I need not be afraid, for the party was given by Dr. Dowdeswell to his London friends, and not to the inmates of his asylum. At first, the curious coincidence that I was invited to a lunatic asylum at the same time that I had been discussing with myself the question of my sanity, rather determined me to refuse the invitation. But I never was fool enough to be frightened by suspicions. A moment's thought convinced me that, had I been as mad as a hatter, it was no one's interest to incarcerate me in such an establishment, and the pleasant emphasis which Miss Stewart gave to her sister's invitation with a well-intoned little 'Do!' determined me, and I am afraid I accepted the invitation almost too eagerly.

The garden-party at Weybridge was to take place the day before the appointment in Gresham Street, and Mrs. Markby drove me down. It was such a day as all garden-party givers wish to have. June did her very best for Dr.

Dowdeswell. Every rose seemed to have come to his garden-party. His gardens were at the height of their summer pride, and Dr. Dowdeswell must have been at the height of his; for his invitation and the weather had attracted distinguished crowds to his entertainment. Among the rest, there was the most popular actor who had, as the critics said, done more for Shakspeare than all his predecessors. There was the fringy-haired poet, whose physique ill matched with the animal passion of his sensuous verse. The place was, in short, a sort of Madame Tussaud's in the flesh. My reflection, and that of another man with whom I conversed under the hawthorn, was that lunacy must be a paying line. The Doctor did the thing in good style. We had tried some of his cups, we had looked into the marquee which was prepared for the cold collation at 8:30, and we and our appetites had approved the preparations. We had even seen that the champagne was worthy of the occasion. Of course there was tennis and archery, and walking up and down, but nothing ever does go well until after supper. At supper I sat beside a pretty girl, who snapped when she spoke; and as I was not much impressed by her, I had time to devote myself to the collation. Greedy,

She passed over the silly addition to my answer, and said with an air of wonderment :

‘It is very odd.’

After that, she was silent for a time ; but so long as she walked with me in the spotted shades of the Chinese lanterns I was happy, and did not want her to speak.

As I have said, I do not suppose that I was with her more than thirty minutes, but I felt the parting like a wrench, as if I was quitting an old friend, when she at length turned to go from me. She held out her hand, and may I be forgiven if it did not linger in mine as I would wish my love’s to linger, softly, confidingly, and then she went. I walked through all the walks again alone.

Was she mad ? or was I ? Was I in love with a mad woman ? Who was she ? What was her name ? That was the thing I must discover. I quitted the dark, leafy alleys, hung with globes of light, and went to where the dancing was still going on. I sought out our pleasant, fussy little host—I am afraid I was excited, but he seemed used to excitement, and looked with a curious, smiling, obliging eye at me, as I questioned him.

‘Who was the lady ? Well, he didn’t know. He had introduced some hundreds of people to

some other hundreds ; how could he recollect? Besides, he did not know the names of half the people there ; hadn't the honor of knowing mine.' So I was baffled, turned on my heel, went away from the glaring light and the blaring music, and out into the quiet gardens again. I dare say that Mrs. Markby and her sister must have thought me very rude ; as a rule I am a punctilious sort of person. But that night I had neglected every duty, just as a man will when some higher behest comes to him. All the responsibility was on Love.

As I walked the darkening gardens, for the candles were going out, I 're-syllabled' all our little conversation without gamboling. She had known me in a sort of way. What did it mean? She had asked me if I had seen her? I never could have forgotten that. I had had my photograph taken ; indeed, many persons had seen it, for it used sometimes to travel about through the desert Post-office, with my tatterdemalion testimonials. But she could not mean that ! Why those inquiries as to my mother's name, which I had answered truly, and why had she seemed disappointed? Self-communings written down are very short, but they take up a great space in our lives. When I had catechized myself fruitlessly thus

for some time, I found that I had stayed too long. When I got back to the music, most of the guests had gone. Mrs. Markby and her sister I sought unsuccessfully, and then went in search of my coat. I found that I had just time to catch the last train. I got into the house, an old rambling house which had evidently been added to from time to time, but I had a difficulty in finding my way to the cloak-room. The architect had designed the passages for hide and seek, and had put two steps here and there with a view to homicide. Somehow, after nearly breaking my neck, I lost my way. At one of those breakneck arrangements, I stumbled against a man—I suppose he was a keeper—who said he would conduct me, and he did. He led me through some of the intricacies I have been speaking of, and into a bedroom; and when I was in, he suddenly went out, shut the door, and I heard the key turn in the lock, and even bolts go home into their roost. At first I laughed; was it a practical joke? Had the man mistaken me for a lunatic? Then the incident struck me as curiously disagreeable, in the light of my past meditations as to insanity. My conduct that night, too, must to any on-looker have seemed strange. Was I mad? I admitted it; madly

in love with a woman I had never seen before, whose name I did not know, and who might, for anything I knew to the contrary, be herself a lunatic. But, in all my experience, I had never heard of certificated lovers, and although I was not unread in such authentic works as 'Sir Lancelot Greaves,' 'Valentine Vox,' and 'Hard Cash,' where the secrets of mad prison-houses are told, I could not imagine that any such scurvy trick was being played on me. Who was to profit by my being shut up? But the laughter soon gave place to anger: no man likes to be curtailed of his liberty. A key turned in his door is an insult to him. Besides, if it were a jest, it was too serious a one to be dubbed a lunatic even for a night.

Ultimately as I sat upon the bed, I thought that the circumstances were, upon the whole, fortunate. The silly mistake of the keeper would save me walking to the station that night, and I would get up to town in the morning in time to be at Gresham Street by twelve. Still, I felt angry: made up my mind to have an ample apology from Dr. Dowdeswell, and even thought of the possibility of damages, as I took off my clothes and went to bed. Although I was deprived of my liberty I slept well, and the next morning, a person who

was, I understood a keeper, brought me some breakfast, and asked me how I had slept, in the lofty, condescending way one speaks to an infant or a dement. Still I thought nothing could be gained by resenting the vulgar impertinence of his manner, and I asked him if he would say to Dr. Dowdeswell that I was obliged to him for his hospitality, but that I must leave at once.

He only smiled. This, I need scarcely say, irritated me, and I insisted upon seeing Dr. Dowdeswell at once. The man then informed me that I could not see the doctor until after twelve o'clock.

'Twelve o'clock?' I said. 'Good heavens! I have an important engagement in the city at twelve.'

'Oh, I dare say they know all about that;' and he smiled again.

'What are you grinning there for?' I asked. 'Do you take me for a lunatic? Take care!' I added, forgetting that violence would only weaken my case in his dull eyes. 'Will you, or will you not, go to Dr. Dowdeswell, and say I insist upon seeing him at once?'

'No violence,' he said, with a self-assured look, as if he were used to that sort of thing; 'Dr. Dowdeswell has gone to town, and won't

be back before twelve, when he'll visit you of course. You be peaceable, like a good gentleman, or mayhap we'll have to put you in the padded room, where you couldn't do no harm to yourself nor your clothes.'

I was mad with rage.

'Could I send a telegram?' I asked.

'Not until the doctor came,' the man answered.

'You shall all answer for this,' I said savagely. But the man had evidently heard the threat before, and, having set down my breakfast, he left me.

Any reader will understand that frenzy is not an appetizer. I walked up and down the room for an hour, leaving the breakfast untouched. But somehow my physical exertion did not allay my mental excitement. Walking up and down would not solve the difficulty. There were thick iron bars in the window; the door was locked and bolted. There was nothing to be done but to wait. So I took some of the coffee, cold as it was, and waited like a damped-down volcano until Dr. Dowdeswell came.

It was half-past twelve when the door opened and the doctor entered. It is a wonder to me now that he did not find me a veritable lunatic. To be shut up in an asylum is a sufficient

insult to a sane man to jeopardize his reason, unless it has very stable foundations. But when to that is added the certainty that the misadventure is ruining one's whole prospects in life, prospects long and eagerly waited for, it is enough to drive one stark mad ; of course I am not a medico-psychologist—that is the fine name they give mad doctors in these days—but I should say so. He was laughingly profuse in his apologies.

‘Was more vexed than he could say ; was ashamed that he had inflicted compulsory hospitality upon me ; congratulated me that I had not had a violent bath, and possibly my head shaved. There was no saying what might not have happened if I had come in contact with the scientific zeal of his medical assistant. He might have tried to relieve the cerebral pressure by raising a bump.’

I admit his trivial and flippant manner made me still more angry. I think, too, I showed it, as I explained that I had probably, through the ill-devised arrangements of his establishment and the blundering of his officials, lost a valuable appointment. I added, that I should certainly go and consult my solicitor as to whether there was or was not a remedy.

My ‘solicitor’ sounded very well, and I think

Dr. Dowdeswell showed some uneasiness, for his next apologies were in a more subdued manner, and were followed by an urgent request that I would stay and lunch with him.

‘If he could do anything to help me, and so compensate for the loss that the carelessness of that foolish attendant might have caused, he would be only too glad.’

I was too hot and angry to answer with much civility. I felt that that which I had been clutching at for months might at the instant be slipping from my grasp while I was parleying with this mad doctor. I declined to lunch with him, and left the house abruptly. I went at once ; but it was not at twelve o’clock but at two o’clock, that I arrived at Gresham Street. I saw a clerk, who told me the directors had gone. I was too anxious to be discreet, and so I asked this underling if he knew whether the appointment of secretary had been made.

‘Yes,’ he answered, and I think I saw a shade of what I interpreted as pity in his face—it may have been a reflection of my own paleness—as I said :

‘And who was appointed?’

‘Mr. Shepherd,’ he answered ; and he added, ‘the directors thought that as you did not present yourself, you had retired from the contest.’

‘What!’ I cried, and I was as near to tears as I have been since I left school, ‘do you mean to say that I might have had it, had I been here?’

‘I think so,’ he answered. ‘Mr. Danescourt was in your favor this time, and he could have had you elected if he had chosen.’

‘Is it too late now?’ I asked, sadly and foolishly, for I had told myself in an instant that it was too late.

‘Yes,’ answered the clerk with gravity, for I think he felt for me. ‘Mr. Shepherd was told of his appointment.’

So it was all over. I had been within an ace of securing a really good appointment, would probably now have been in receipt of an excellent salary, had it not been for that diabolical mistake at Dr. Dowdeswell’s lunatic asylum. It is all very well to say that wisdom will not cry over spilled milk, but I wonder what man would have been wise enough not to bite his lips until they bled, nor to allow his nails to anchor in his palms under vexatious circumstances like these! Still it is not wise to trouble other people with such sorrows. I think the fact that I was, to use a slang phrase, ‘cut up’ had the effect of eliciting more information from that clerk than he would otherwise have been inclined to give. I discovered from him that

there had been a proposal to postpone the election for a week, in order to give me an opportunity of presenting myself, and that, strange to say, it was Mr. Danescourt who had resisted that course. I felt that there was some mystery in all this; if he was really in my favor, why had he been against the adjournment of the election? When once a leaven of suspicion gets into the head, it soon leavens the whole lump of thought. It was through him that I had become acquainted with Mr. Markby. It was with Mr. Markby's wife and sister that I had gone to that cursed lunatic asylum, where I had been detained. Was there some diabolical conspiracy under all this seeming courtesy and favor? As I wandered westward again, I kept revolving these thoughts in my head, and, ridiculous as the suspicion appeared to me then, and even now with the fuller light of events, I could not dissuade myself that there was some sinister connection between these untoward events. But, strange to say, although I was bitterly disappointed, and as I have said upon the very shore of tears, I was not so grievously crestfallen as I would have been the day before. Something had happened to me since yesterday. Just as the same common features of the landscape make a totally different picture under

the high-set sun of noon and the shadow-throwing orb of the violet evening, so do the events of a common day assume an entirely different aspect when they are illumined by the poor light of hopeless life, and the hopeful light of love.

That I did not feel the most serious evil which had happened to me in my life more acutely, was due to the fact that, since the evening before, I had been in love ; and love—love means hope.

Not a very hopeful affair mine, you would say. I had seen and walked with a woman who was, we will admit it, beautiful, although Chinese-lantern light is not the best means of judging. But, besides that, I knew nothing about her. I did not know her name or her address. I did not know whether she was sane or insane, married or unmarried. Not a very good soil to grow love upon, one would say. But those who have felt love will know that it prospers under seemingly the most unfavorable conditions, and that, tend it, pamper it how you will, it will often slip through your careful fingers.

Although everything seemed against me, I had that in my favor which is a match for everything ; I was in love. Now that is a very

fine sentiment, and looks admirable on the page of a novel ; but when you come to work with it in real life, it is found a very inadequate instrument. I put it to the test in the next three days. I did not seek any appointment. My testimonials had a holiday, but I was as busy as I used to be when I was hawking my poor wares ; I was attempting to discover the woman I loved. But at the end of the three days, while my sentiments were just as fervid, my knowledge was just as scanty.

It is scarcely worth while to tell you all I did in that vain search. I went to Dr. Dowdswell, at Weybridge, and threw myself on his mercy. I think he began to suspect that his attendant's mistake had not been so great a one after all. But, as he still had the fear of my 'solicitor' before his eyes, he humored me. He gave me a list of all the guests who had been invited to his garden party. He did more ; he took me through his *asylum*, and pointed out all the inmates who had been allowed to mix with his guests ; and I was satisfied of one thing, that *she* was not a lunatic. How I could have thought it possible puzzled me. But my head was full of thoughts about insanity, and much that she had said to me was exceedingly strange. I found out

which of his guests had young daughters fairly answering to the description which was so carefully registered in my memory ; and I haunted two houses in London fruitlessly for hours.

I admit that this was all very foolish, and it is a matter of wonder now that I did not attract the attention of the police. Of course my inquiries resulted in no discovery, and probably never would. But chance rules the world after all, and just as by some chance I had nearly won the office of secretary to the Insurance Company, which by chance I lost, so chance now gave me the information which all my diligence would never have procured for me.

CHAPTER III.

MESSRS. SORRENSEN AND TEAL—NEW ENCOURAGEMENT—MY CURIOUS MISSION—CHANCE STOOD MY FRIEND OR PROVED MY ENEMY.

NO doubt my foolish passion had made me lose sight of important opportunities. But at the end of three days I became aware of the necessity that existed for doing something more in this life than seeking for the traces of a lost love. I went, therefore, and called on Mr.

Danescourt in Grosvenor Crescent. I felt aggrieved that he who had encouraged me to hope for success should have been the means of marring all my hopes. It was rather from a sense of irritation that I went to see him, than from any hope of a practical result. When I was shown into his room he stood up, with his back to the fire, and did not ask me to be seated. When I explained the reason of my visit — scarcely a sufficient one perhaps — he seemed angry at being taken to task, and practically refused all explanation. He spoke uneasily, seemed anxious to get rid of me, said that really he could not attend to the matter then, but that if I would call on him in the City the next day, he would see what could be done. I went away hurt, angry. Most men can bear an insult or an injury; very few men a snub. At first I was fully determined not to see Mr. Danescourt again. But then the remembrance of my weary waiting, of my ragged testimonials, of my attenuated patrimony, made me think that it would be wiser to go.

Beggars must not be too sensitive as to the 'slights of office.' We are wise after the event, but I think I may say with truth that I would have had a very different story to tell if my dudgeon had kept me away from the City that

day. But it did not. Mr. Danescourt seemed a different man in his office from the one I had seen twenty-four hours before, on the Bohemian rug of his library. To-day he was courteous, even kind. He said that he was exceedingly sorry that I had not been appointed, but that, owing to my absence, he really thought I had ceased to care for it. 'Perhaps,' he added, 'the fault had been his; but since he had seen me yesterday, he had made inquiries, and had discovered something that he thought would suit me admirably. Would I mind leaving England?' he asked.

'No,' I said at once; and then there was a pang of memory. I remembered the twilight evening four days gone by, the dusky garden walks, the globes of light, and, above all, the stars. And—— But I must not quarrel with bread-and-butter. My eyes were upon his face, and I thought that he was pleased by my unhesitating answer. He did not guess the *arriere pensee*.

'Well,' he said, 'a firm, friends of mine, wish to have certain important inquiries made in Stockholm, possibly in St. Petersburg; wish to know the whereabouts of a man who was formerly in their employment, and to recover some papers from him, if it is possible. At first

sight,' he added, 'it seems as if I were imposing on you the duty of a private inquiry office. It is nothing in the divorce line,' he continued, with a forced laugh; 'what they require is the services of a gentleman who has been unconnected with the firm, and in whom they can place implicit confidence.'

'But they do not know anything of me,' I said, with more of conscience than I would have been master of, if it had not been for the memory of that night at Weybridge, and the thought that this curious mission would take me away from England.

'I will answer for you,' he said; and I expressed as best I could my gratitude to him, although I failed to understand why he should become answerable for one of whom he knew so little. My long series of disappointments had given me a very diffident opinion of myself; but under this new encouragement I was recovering my vanity. It is wonderful how well that weed flourishes under a very little coaxing from sun and rain.

So it was settled that I should call upon Messrs. Sorrenson and Teal and discuss the matter with them, assured by Mr. Danescourt that no difficulty as to salary and matters of that sort would stand in the way. And I left

his office for the first time, after all those weary months of waiting, with the idea that I was, after all, to be of some use in the world, and that I was not quite what Turgenieff has called 'a superfluous man.' It raises a man ever so much in his own estimation, the discovery of work which he thinks he can do ; but, to be candid, I was not so happy in my good fortune as I should have been. It is the heart that throws the anchor, and I felt that, going abroad with all my sails set, I was after all dragging mine.

It was upon the next day after that that I called at the office of Messrs. Sorrenson and Teal. I believe they were merchants, but I admit that I am wonderfully ignorant of the many distinctions that exist east of Temple Bar, and could not tell the difference between brokers, merchants, jobbers, underwriters, and the like. I was soon made aware, however, as indeed Mr. Danescourt had hinted, that my commission would necessitate no knowledge of the business. One thing I soon gathered, and that was that neither Mr. Sorrenson nor Mr. Teal had the gift of lucid explanation. The former might have been excused, for he spoke our language with a very foreign accent ; but the latter was as lame in the art of narration as

his senior partner. I will not weary the reader, as these gentlemen wearied me, with their floundering instructions, but will tell in my own words what I gathered and understood from their meandering conversation. Perhaps some of the explanation that I now give would have been impossible, but for the light that after-events threw upon the circumstances of my engagement. I confess that at the time I was left in considerable doubt as to the real nature of the dark business upon which I was to embark, and I accounted for the verbose reticence of my employers by thinking that there might be much that they were not desirous of imparting at this early period of our acquaintance ; still this curious secrecy made me uncomfortable. I got the impression, rightly or wrongly, that the mission in which I was embarked was as much to please their friend Mr. Danescourt as it was to further the objects of their own business. It was evident, however, from what they said that they were not sacrificing anything in pleasuring him, for they seemed to believe that I would do as well as anyone else.

This was not flattering to my vanity, but at the same time it relieved me from any doubts about my ability to carry out the duties which might devolve upon me. As to these duties I

understood this much. Messrs. Sorrenson and Teal had had in their employment a Mr. Hare. I could not gather whether Mr. Hare had, or had not, been recommended to them, like myself, by Mr. Danescourt; but that he had proved a very unsatisfactory servant seemed certain. If I understood these gentlemen aright, he had been guilty of embezzlement, and he had managed his crime in such a way as to implicate the firm. How that was possible I could not imagine, but I am repeating as nearly as possible what I understood of their conversation. This Mr. Hare had not only been a clever swindler, but had taken an interest in somewhat perilous political matters. Sent to St. Petersburg for the firm, he had, I was informed, put his hand into the hot water of Nihilism. Hot water under pressure produces bursts, and in that particular case the explosion was aimed at a crowned head, but had luckily missed its mark.

All this seems simple enough as I tell it; but in the entangled words of these gentlemen I assure you it was far from clear. At one time I could have imagined that the business upon which Hare had been sent had been business not of the firm, but of Mr. Danescourt. I even thought that they meant to indicate that it

was he, Mr. Danescourt, who had in the first instance become mixed up with Russian politics, and that it was through him that Hare had got into the earth-burrows through which Nihilists walk, and in which plots have their dirty roots. But on reconsideration this supposition seemed too absurd. 'It is not them as has money, as breaks into houses and steals,' I thought; and Mr. Danescourt was too prosperous to associate himself with the poor envious and dissatisfied party which thinks to shape society by 'blast-ing-powder.' I know, of course, that this is far from a lucid account of my interview, but it is impossible to give one. I left these gentlemen with the vaguest impressions on my mind, such as may be produced on a prepared photographic plate by a laughing, bustling group before the camera.

Of course Hare had made Russia too hot for him, and, having also planted thorns in his nest in England, he deemed it expedient to remain abroad. He had, however, in his possession many papers belonging to the firm, which they were very desirous of recovering. They admitted, with apparent frankness, that they would not desire to prosecute him if he would return to England to-morrow; and they practically asked me to start on this curious mission un-

armed, authorizing me, however, to use some threats which were admittedly useless. When last they heard of Hare he was in Stockholm, but he might possibly have left Sweden before I reached it. They would write, they said, to me from time to time, and communicate any information as to his whereabouts that reached them. I asked for some description of the man that I had to find, and was struck by their hesitation in furnishing me with details. They had no photograph; he was about my own size, not bad-looking, wore—but he might have changed his dress. This was all, in addition to his address in Stockholm, No. 84, Hornsgatan, that I gathered as to the man I had to find. Now, as I have told the story of my instructions, they seem fairly intelligible and above-board. But the way in which they were given to me by Messrs. Sorrenson and Teal left me exceedingly doubtful both as to the object and result of my curious mission. Still it is an old proverb that beggars must not be choosers; the terms offered were liberal, and I accepted the somewhat anomalous office which was open to me.

Before leaving London I thought it only right to call and thank Mr. Danescourt. I went to his house in Grosvenor Crescent, and not to

the City, somewhat thoughtlessly, for I called at an hour at which he was usually at business. But my thoughtlessness—if it were only thoughtlessness—led to a curious result. The unlikelihood of my finding him never occurred to me until I was at the door. But then it struck me; and I was somewhat surprised, therefore, when the servant said he thought Mr. Danescourt was in, and showed me into a room behind the dining-room (almost all London houses are built on the same plan), where I waited for some minutes. I was looking at an ivory paper-knife, with a cleverly carved handle, when the door opened, and to my infinite surprise neither the servant nor Mr. Danescourt appeared in the doorway, but the girl or woman I had met at the garden-party stood before me. So it was—chance stood my friend, or proved my enemy. There was no question about it; there she stood, looking more lovely than ever. There was surprise and, I thought, fear on her face as she looked at me with her large beautiful eyes, and then I heard her say:

‘You here!’

I had risen from my seat and approached her. I held out my hand and she put hers in it, and I believe—for I scarcely know what

happened—that she did not withdraw it when I pressed it in my hot, twitching fingers.

‘I thought,’ she went on wonderingly, ‘that you had gone.’

‘No, not yet,’ I answered, with some astonishment that she knew or took an interest in my movements; ‘but I am going—going away for a long time, perhaps—going to-morrow.’

‘I am sorry,’ she said, as her eyes fell; and then she seemed to see that her hand was still in mine, for she withdrew it, but not reprovingly.

‘Will you tell me your name?’ I asked eagerly.

‘Why; do you not know that?’ she said. ‘How odd! But I do not like your going away.’

It is strange how all great occasions are devoid of words. The conversations which are the turning-points of a lifetime culminate in ‘Yes’ or ‘No,’ and sometimes even these fatal monosyllables are only implied and not expressed. This conversation, as I write it, seems very silly, but it was not silly at the time.

‘May I not write to you?’ I said, with entreaty in my voice.

‘No,’ she answered decisively; ‘impossible.

You should not even propose such a thing. Good-bye. Still I am sorry you are going.'

'Will you not give me something to keep my memory fresh and green?' I asked stupidly, despairingly.

'No,' she answered, and turned from me. But I was desperate. There was a ribbon at her throat, and the tie was undone. I snatched at it, and it came to me as she went. She did not seem to know or to resent the theft, for she said again, 'Good-bye. I am sorry.'

She was gone.

I stood there wrapt in wonder, with the warm ribbon in my hand and questions coursing through my head. Why was she sorry? Why must I not write to her? How came she to know of my going? Had she not left this ribbon with me? At that instant the servant entered the room with apologies; he could not find Mr. Danescourt anywhere. He had sought him all over the house; he must have gone out without his knowing it. He was very sorry.

But I had lost my interest in Mr. Danescourt.

'Who was the lady that was in the room just now?'

'Lady, sir?'

‘Yes,’ I said, ‘the lady who came in here while you were seeking Mr. Danescourt.’

‘Lady, sir?’ he repeated. ‘It must have been Mrs. Danescourt.’

‘Mrs. Danescourt?’

I left town for Hull that night.

CHAPTER IV.

A STRANGE ENCOUNTER—A LOOK OF SURPRISE
AND RECOGNITION—A NEW PHASE OF MYSTERY
—WHEN I RECOVERED SHE WAS GONE.

IT is quite certain that one’s estimate of one’s own character is for the most part worthless. I therefore express these opinions about myself with very great diffidence. I do not—I never, except in my very happiest and most foolish moments, consider myself clever; but I have always been under the impression that, although there was no aureole round my head, I was not a bad man. Possibly I was that contemptible sort of person who walks in the pleasant paths of mediocrity. However, I know that my character must be the least interesting part of this book, and I apologize for these confidences. All confidences are

misplaced. All that I meant to convey—and that has a bearing on my story—was that, on the whole, although the leaving London just when I had found the only woman who had ever made me feel like a fool, and yet convince me that such folly transcended all wisdom, was a wrench; yet I was glad to go. I never for an instant contemplated the possibility of loving her in any other way than in distant secrecy. I was not so base as to wrong her, her husband, who had been my benefactor, and myself, by wicked thoughts which could touch her honor; and yet my love was still in me like a raging fire. But it was like a raging fire under a well directed hose, playing the cold water of duty on it. Even if I could have thought of loving her openly who owed duty to another, even if I could have thought so meanly of her as to believe it possible that she could give any love to me, still beyond all that I was under deep obligations to her husband. I would have considered myself doubly base to have wrecked his peace, even if the way had been open to such an outrage. My duty was very clear, as all duty always is. Choose that which irks you most, and you won't go far wrong, if you are a common flesh-and-blood human being as I was. I was going away from


her for a long time; it might be that I would never see her again, but even this pain gave me some satisfaction. In a distant sort of way I could realize the enjoyment of martyrs. But the reader must not think that when I got into the train at King's Cross I settled myself quietly to my evening paper. No; my head was full of misgivings—of questions. Was it her husband who was jealously banishing me from England, on what might be a dangerous mission, that he might keep her love? Had she been a party to my banishment? Did she care for me? She had said she was sorry that I was going, but why? She had only seen me once; true, that one evening had been sufficient to make me love once and for ever—at least so I thought. But I was not fool enough to believe that she too had been similarly impressed by me. And yet I could not forget her lingering hand in mine; I could not forget her expression of sorrow. Nor could I forget the strange surprise and blush which had met me on her face, when first I was introduced to her. No, it was all a mystery; and when I had to change carriages at Doncaster I was as deep in the well, but no nearer to truth than when I passed Hatfield. Not a word of the evening paper, which I held in my hand all the way, had I read.

The more familiarity I have with mental processes, the more contempt I have for them. They are about as futile as a lever without a fulcrum. Give them facts, and then a fool's mental processes will grind out the truth. Deprive them of facts, and it is like a churn working in air: a year's turning will not result in an ounce of butter.

There was not much of interest happened on that voyage from Hull to Gothenberg. I made the acquaintance of one pleasant Swede, who was returning home after having spent some years in England. He, like myself, was going to Stockholm, and he was not only a pleasant companion, but a useful guide. As this is not a guide-book, I do not intend to describe the pleasant journey by steamboat from Gothenberg through the canal and over the great lakes to the capital. I won't even attempt the description of the Trollhatten Falls. My friend Ostberg went with me to the Grand Hotel. I never am allowed to forget that hotel, for although it is a great many years since I was there, the hotel label still sticks to my portmanteau. But I have other reasons for remembering the Grand Hotel at Stockholm more valid than the excellence of the paste on the label.

There was not much to remark in the bedroom

in which I found myself, sipping some coffee after my bath. In the corner there was the tall white stove, of course ; nothing indeed was curious except the fact that there were two windows—one which was intended to admit the light, and the other which wasn't. The first overlooked a spacious yard ; the second looked into a blank wall, about two and a half feet distant from it. I admit I wondered why on earth the architect had made a window there. No zigzag ray of light could get in at it. I had the curiosity to put my head out, and the blank wall of the neighboring building towered up an immense height above me. I had reason afterward to take an interest in that window, but, as I say, even then, when I was having my coffee, I could not help wondering at the strange architectural vagary which invited the eyes to a vista of two and a half feet ended by yellow bricks. But I was dressed at last, and went downstairs to meet my fellow-passenger, Ostberg, with the view of proceeding with him to the Hasselbacken, where we intended to dine. I believe it is almost the invariable custom of visitors to Stockholm to take boat at the Stromparterren under the Norrbro, and proceed to the restaurant where we dined that day. These boats, a sort of steam-omnibuses, ply between



various parts of the city, and our water-journey was all too quickly over; for the day was hot, and the breath from the swift waters of the Malar under the awning was pleasant and refreshing. I was the host on this occasion, as my Swedish friend had entertained me to a Swedish supper at the quaint inn at Trollhatten. And I made the meal as like an English dinner as the resources of the restaurateur would let me. Of course the champagne was sweet. Still, as I say, the day was beautiful, and we sat and enjoyed the eventide while there was still a bottle in the ice-pail to show that there was no reason why we should not leisurely enjoy our cigarettes.

While we were sitting thus, and I was gathering some information about Sweden and the Swedes, a girl, who had recently seated herself along with a companion at a neighboring table, looked at me with what I took to be surprise and recognition. I was not wrong in this surmise, for in an instant she threw me a kiss and greeted me by the name of George. At first I thought that I was intercepting a greeting and a caress which were intended for some one behind me, and I turned to look, but there was no one there. I did not, however, appropriate the misdirected civility, and for a few minutes I

did not look in the direction whence the kiss had come. When I did raise my eyes, the place where the girls had been was vacant. Ostberg, who was sitting with his back to the girl, had not, I thought, seen the polite aerial caress, as the Icelandic poet called it, of which I had somehow been the mistaken object.

I confess to no little surprise. I did not take the civility to be an ordinary politeness from one of her class. I thought that there had been a genuine recognition in her eyes when she first saw me. I scarcely heard the laughing conversation of my friend Ostberg, so deeply was I thinking of the curious incident. Why, too, had the girl disappeared? But I was beginning to think too much about mysteries, so I forced myself to listen to the band; and when we had finished our other bottle, we walked out in the dusky evening to have a stroll through the grounds which are attached to the restaurant. Even the very brassy band, when we got a little way away, down some of the darkening walks, was pleasant to hear. We were threading our way through one of the paths, and talking as we went. We were far away from the lights now. Indeed, we must have been at almost the darkest part of the bosky alley in which we were wandering, when I felt

a hand laid on my arm, and, turning aside, I saw standing opposite me the girl or woman who had addressed me in the restaurant. Ostberg was looking at me, and, although I could not see, I knew he was smiling, as he went on a few paces, leaving me with the girl. I waited to hear her speak, which she did whenever Ostberg had got beyond reach of a whisper.

‘George,’ she said eagerly, with a breath that touched my cheek, ‘what are you doing here? Are you mad?’ She spoke excitedly, but in excellent English.

‘There must be some mistake,’ I said; ‘my name is not George.’

‘Fool,’ she answered, between her teeth, ‘do you think that that lie will deceive me or others? I have no reason to love you now, God knows, but I did once, and I don’t want to have your blood upon my head, and therefore I warn you. Go at once.’

‘May I ask with whom I have the honor of conversing?’ I asked; but the girl stamped her foot.

‘None of that foolery. If you will not be warned, it is your fault, not mine. You ought to know the risk you run. Your blood be upon your own head.’

‘But ——’ I said in real perplexity, and I

would have asked again for further light upon this dubious matter, but she turned from me, and stepped into the darkness made by the bushes at the side of the path. I went a few paces in pursuit of her, but the branches she had displaced swept back with a sharp blow in my face, and, when I recovered, she was gone.

‘Upon my word,’ said Ostberg, ‘you have made a sudden conquest, or met an old friend. Which is it? She called you George—a good traveling name, as the French say of Capitaine.’

‘I assure you I never saw the girl before; and even now her communication was anything but a love-passage.’

‘Ah, no! we call it assignation.’

‘No, nor that, I assure you.’

‘Why not? She was a very pretty girl, M. George.’

‘Was she?’ I asked, for I had scarcely noticed her looks.

‘Was she? That is good, very good. You play the part very well; but tell me when you want to get rid of me, and I will go.’

I saw that his idea was too deeply rooted to be dislodged by a few assertions. Indeed, I thought he spoke as if my better luck had hurt him. Men are jealous of one another if a pretty woman even looks at one and overlooks the

other. And the man looked at is silly enough usually to be vain of the attention, even when, as in my case it must undoubtedly be, I only intercepted the courtesy which was not intended for me. But it was obvious that my friend was less my friend because of the incident, but I thought it wise not to pursue the subject; the more you work to get the thorn of suspicion out of the flesh, the deeper does it sink in. So I let the matter rest there. Indeed, I was not in a mood to meet banter with common-places which confess as much as they deny; I wanted to think. What did this new phase of mystery in my black-and-white career mean? Had the girl really mistaken me for someone else who bore the name of 'George?' If the true purport of her speech had not been in what she said, what had she gained by her pseudo-mistake and assumed anger? No! it must have been genuine anger. She meant the epithets she applied to me; of that I was very certain. Then she had spoken about love. Was there someone who loved her, who was jealous of the man she had mistaken me for? That was at least a possible explanation. But while I was thus thinking with myself my reverie was burglariously broken into by Ostberg, who said with some dudgeon in his voice :

‘Come, Darnell, it is not fair having secrets from me. I knew the girl before I went to England; and now she has not a word to throw to me, but blows kisses to you, waylays you in the dark, and you pretend to know nothing of it. I cannot blame you for getting the girl’s favor, but I am jealous of you all the same. We used to be much to one another, and you can see for yourself whether she took any notice of me. Come, I’ve been frank with you. How came you to know her and win her?’

‘My good fellow,’ I answered, ‘I don’t know her—never saw her in my life; and as for winning her, I am guiltless or innocent of that great triumph. The course is free, so far as I am concerned. Go in and—win, or, as we say, walk over.’

I saw, however, that my words did not remove his suspicion, and there was more coldness between us as we went back to the landing-stage under the Norrbro, over the dark, swirling waters of the Malar, than when we came in the breathless afternoon. When men misunderstand one another, their thoughts run to extremities at once, and I have no doubt that he thought it would be justice to chuck me overboard for a meddling, interfering gallant, just as I thought he might have a ducking for a

sour, suspicious companion. Although we sat silent together, no tragedy came of our inward musings, and we walked back silently to the Grand Hotel, and threw good-nights to one another, much in the same spirit that one throws a bone to a snarling dog, as we separated for the night.

I confess I felt sorry that I did not know more—neither the name nor address of my interlocutor in the gardens, and Ostberg had said that she was pretty.

CHAPTER V.

SETTING OUT ON MY SEARCH—FRUITLESS INQUIRIES—AN INCORRIGIBLE JOKER—WATCHED AND FOLLOWED—AN ANONYMOUS LETTER.

IT is not much use, as I have already said, pursuing a subject through the labyrinth of one's mental processes. Think as I would about my strange encounter of that evening, I could make nothing of it. I lay on my bed, looked at that strange window, which was a few feet from me, and from which I saw a fine expanse of dark brick wall about two and a

half feet beyond, but nothing came of my thinking or gazing. The next morning I saw Ostberg, but the coldness which had somehow come between us over night was still between us, chilling all genial intercourse. Still I made up my mind to forget these matters, and to set to work at once on the business which had brought me to Stockholm. If Hare was in the capital there would, I thought, be no difficulty in finding him, and after breakfast I set out on my search. I had been supplied, as I mentioned, with the address of the house at which he had lodged, and I set out for that place. As I went, however, I for the first time realized the difficulty that was in my way; and that was, my ignorance of the language. How could I make inquiries as to Hare's whereabouts, if he was not in Stockholm, of persons who probably spoke nothing but their own language—a language of which I had only accurately acquired about two words, *ol* and *smorgas*? These two were very good in their way, and had stood me in excellent stead hitherto. But now—still I must do my best; and shortly after eleven, upon a very wet morning, I stood before the door of No. 84 Hornsgatan, which is a street in the southern part of the city, in which, by the way, Swedenborg used to live.

I knocked at the door, and waited somewhat impatiently; for the rain came down in torrents. But I had to knock again before the door was opened. When it was opened, a woman stood before me, who interrupted my inquiry, 'Does Mr. Hare live here?'—which I meant to follow with a '*God morgan*'—with an 'Ach Gott!'

But I remembered Cardinal Wolsey's advice to his English followers when they went to France. 'If,' he said, 'they speak to you in the French tongue, speak you to them in the English tongue; for if you understand not them, they shall no more understand you.' And, acting on the advice, I continued:

'My good woman, there is no necessity for this surprise. I was only asking a simple question. Does Mr. Hare still reside in this house?'

'Is it Mr. Hare you inquire for?' she said, with a look of very considerable incredulity (that is the same Swedish as in English). 'Oh! indeed, he has gone to Upsala.'

Now this statement seemed clear and categorical, although it was uttered in slow, broken English. But I was very strongly under the impression that the woman was not speaking the truth. The way that she, a clean, comely person of about forty, looked at me was not

reassuring. There was surprise legibly written upon her open face.

‘Do you know his address in Upsala?’ I asked. ‘Did he leave his address? Does he have letters forwarded?’

But this short address did not disarm her suspicions: she said, ‘What do you want with him?’

But this was not, somehow, although it looks like it written down, a straightforward question. I could not rid myself of the idea that the woman was, in some sort of lumbering native way, quizzing me; and as that is never a very pleasant conclusion to come to, I hastened to bring our conversation to an end, but not before she had asked, still as I thought satirically, if I was a friend of the Herr? I said I was not exactly a friend; whereat she laughed somewhat more merrily than the inherent humor of my answer seemed to merit.

‘Then,’ she said, still speaking slowly, as if she were translating as she went, ‘there are some papers of his here, which perhaps you would like to have.’

Papers, I thought, with hope rising in me, as the mercury runs up to ‘set fair;’ perhaps they may be the very papers I am sent for.

‘My good woman, I should like nothing

better than to have these papers ; indeed, I think they may in some sense belong to me. Well, if not to me, to my employers.'

'Ah, not to you !' she said, and she laughed fatly again.

'No, not to me,' I said, still misunderstanding the joke. 'But what are they? Can I see them?'

'Oh yes, you can see them. They are *Rakmunga*—what you call "bills."'

I gave the woman up as an incorrigible joker, and turned and left her there, still standing on the doorstep, and still laughing at her fine shafts of irony which had overshot my head.

What was to be done now? Would it be worth while to follow up her hint and go to Upsala? There was no other possible avenue of inquiry open to me ; but the trains were badly timed, and I had to postpone my going until the following day. Although I knew of nothing that I could do that would further the object with which I had come up to Sweden, and although an iceberg seemed to have floated down between myself and my friend Ostberg, I spent the day pleasantly enough, although there were heavy showers now and then. I again visited the Djur-garden, half because the guide-book said one ought to, but also half

because it led me to Hasselbacken ; for I had a vain hope that I might there meet the woman who had spoken to me the night before, and clear up the mystery of her curious communication. But luck was against me. Next morning I took train to Upsala, and when I got there made inquiries at the Post Office if there was a Mr. Hare in the town. The people were very civil, and took a great deal of trouble for me, and in the end informed me that there had been such a person there some months before, but that no letters came for him now. They gave me the name and number of the street in which he had resided, and I went there. But my inquiries were fruitless. I had the greatest difficulty in making myself understood, and the servant—I suppose it was the servant—only shook her head the more I said ‘Mr. Hare, Herr Hare, Adelsman Hare, Man Hare.’ Nothing was to be made out of that clue, so I returned to Stockholm. What was to be done now? I must wait for further instructions from Messrs. Sorrenson and Teal. I think it must have been a fortnight before any letter from England reached me. During the delay I had seen as much of the very beautiful city and its surroundings as I could. I had, too, more than once, out of curiosity, made search for the girl

who had spoken to me on the night of my arrival. I had gone to the places where it was most likely that she would be, but unsuccessfully always. Meanwhile, although there was much to interest in the Swedish capital, I felt very lonely, and for the last two or three days uncomfortable. Ostberg had gone away, he did not tell me where ; and I somehow came to the conclusion that I was being followed as I went about the streets, and being watched wherever I went. I tried to reason myself out of the suspicion, assured myself that it arose out of Mrs. Danescourt's words before I left England, and that girl's strange warning when I arrived in Sweden. But, reason as I would, the impression would not go. I think it was just the day that I received my letters from England that Ostberg turned up again in the saloon of the Grand Hotel. I went up to him, for as I say I wanted some one to talk to ; but he was still, I thought, a little cold. We were talking about indifferent subjects, as we stood at the sideboard, when suddenly *a propos de bottes* he said, 'I thought you said your name was Darnell?'

'So it is,' I answered.

'What ! *George* Darnell?'

'No,' I said ; 'Frederick is my christian name.

Do you still believe in the silly mistake of the girl we saw the night we dined together?’

Without answering he said, ‘And I thought you told me you had never been in Sweden—never seen Stockholm before?’

‘That is so. I said it, and it is true. This is my first visit; but why do you ask?’

‘Oh, for nothing,’ he answered, and then, as if to change the subject, he asked if I would care to see something of Swedish Bohemian life, and would go with him to a ball at the Sodra Salongen that night.

Although the questions may have had no significance, still they struck me as being curious. But my letters from England, which arrived soon after this conversation, put these matters out of my head. One from Sorrenson and Teal asked me to remain in Stockholm until I heard from them again. They had noted what I said as to Hare’s not being in Sweden, but they thought it more than probable that he might return to Stockholm very soon. He had made St. Petersburg, where he had been recently, too hot for him.

The other letter was a more curious one. It was addressed to me as Darnell, Esq., Stockholm, and I suppose it found its way to the Grand Hotel with the other, which was correctly

addressed. It was written in a woman's hand—a woman who had begun to sign her name, who had indeed written her christian name and then carefully obliterated it. So the letter was an anonymous one. It ran as follows:

‘LONDON, *July* 18.

‘You are, I fear—in great danger. It would be wiser to return to England at once.

‘I am, yours truly,

‘ ’

And then came the name which had been scratched out. I tried for an hour to make out that name, and, after all the labor and ingenuity that I brought to bear upon it, I guessed rather than saw that it was ‘Alice.’ I did not know anyone whose name was Alice, and could not make out what it meant. At first I thought that it was a letter from my acquaintance of the Hasselbacken. It told the same story that she did—that I was in danger, and must go at once. But then I looked, and, there was no doubt about it, the post-mark was London. Then it occurred to me that she might have sent the letter to London to be posted there; and I examined the water-mark of the paper, but could make nothing of that. It never seriously occurred to me to act on the advice of the anonymous letter, although I admit that its

get me out of Stockholm. The names and addresses in the postscript were inventions ; and after spending more than a fortnight in Christiania I returned to Stockholm, very angry at having been duped and cozened. The night after my return to Stockholm I spent alone.

I had considerable reluctance in moving about in a city in which I was followed. But, wearying of my own society, late in the evening I went to hear an Austrian band play in a *café* or music-hall in the Kingstradgarden. I may have an idiosyncrasy, but somehow to me music is a sort of oil poured upon the troubled waters of my soul. The band made up for the want of fine execution by the loudness of its performance ; still I believe it was good. I know it helped me to pass an anxious, tedious evening. The movements in the place, the people who came in and passed out, the lights, the uniform of the band, and the agile activity of the conductor all distracted my attention from the painful idea of mystery which haunted me now on all occasions. But I had not a long respite. Before I had been there an hour I became painfully conscious of the presence of a man at a little marble table not far from me, who all the time I had my eyes on him never looked at me.

Of course the reader will think that this was


a foolish suspicion. I myself would account for it by the fact that my nerves were unstrung by the various warnings I had received, and that suspicion, like a foul bird, lit on the first perch and croaked there. But I think I had reason on my side. I moved from one table to another, and then I knew that man's eyes followed me. I rose to go toward the door, and I saw him rise too. I took a place at another table, and he seemed to have changed his mind and again sat down. There was nothing particular about the man. He had a swarthy Celtic complexion, shaggy eyebrows, and nervous twitching mouth—a good man for a spy. But why should his eyes dog me? I had seen the man before, too; of that I was certain. With these thoughts running in my head, it was not easy to pay much attention to Strauss' waltzes.

After waiting there for a little while, I tired of the furtive espionage, and rose finally to leave the place. I stopped at the door; and my swarthy keeper had not risen, but his eyes were fixed on me. From the coolness with which the night air bathed me as I passed into the darkness, I knew that my excitement, quite burning as it was, had made me feverish. Whenever I was under the thick sky through which not a star-lance could send a splinter of

light, I thought to avoid my pursuer by making as much haste as I could, and I trotted across the King's Park, past the fountain, until I was under the statue of Charles XII. There I turned my head to look over my shoulder to see whether I was followed; saw nothing behind me, but felt my left arm touched, then clutched, and, turning my head again, I saw the girl whom I had met before, standing close to me. Even in the dull light I could see that her pale face was full of care, but I had no time to think: she spoke at once.

‘Do you not know that you are dogged, watched, followed?’ At each word I felt her fingers tighten on my arm, as if to emphasize her words. ‘George or not George—and I think you are not George—you will lose your life if you stay here. Go, for God’s sake.’

I glanced from her up at the statue, and the left arm which pointed to the east seemed to say ‘Go’ as emphatically as the poor girl beside me. I wanted to talk with her, to ask her the reason of her fears: her sympathy with me had touched some fiber in my heart. Besides, I saw, even in the faint light, that the careworn face was a pretty one. When my eyes fell from that imperious gauntleted hand of the great statue to where she stood beside me, with



her touch still thrilling on my arm, her place was vacant! I looked about in the darkness, dazzled by the lights about the park, but I could see nothing. I strode on to the Grand Hotel, sad, suspicious, morbidly fearful.

I don't often look under my bed before I go between the sheets, but I did that night. Of course there was nobody there; but as I raised myself from my scrutiny, the curious glare of the window to my left hand struck me as disagreeable. The bed stood in a recess, and the window, which, as I have said, looked into the unembellished bricks of a neighboring wall, was in the side of the recess at the right hand of anyone lying on the bed. The curious glare of the glass had never struck me before, and I looked up to see if there was a blind to draw down, but there was none. I laughed grimly - to myself to think of having a blind where by no possibility a sun's ray ever could come. I locked and bolted the door, and got into bed.

Anyone who has had sleepless nights will know what wonderful foundations there are for fear and suspicion in the ordinary night noises. No wonder men believed in ghosts. There are methodical creaks which painfully resemble weird footsteps. There are inexplicable thuds, which one could take an oath could be caused

by nothing but a body falling on a floor. Locks seem to work of themselves, and every sound is inexplicable. I must have been asleep some time, and perhaps some one of these strange noises had roused me into the dim consciousness which comes before waking. I was in the shallows of sleep, which are close to the shore of waking. I was lying on my right side, with my face to the window, and the glare I had noted before I went to bed again attracted my enfeebled attention. But in the glare there was a whiter patch; something livid shone from the sheeny blankness. In an instant I thought it was a face. I raised myself on my elbow, and peered into the darkness: it *was* a face, I would be sworn! But, man or woman, whoever was looking at me had become aware of the change in my position. I saw the face pressed close against the pane. I thought I knew the features, and, like a coward, I cried out! Then there was a report, a crack, a clatter, some oaths, and then a fearful silence! Believe me, for some seconds I had not an idea what had happened; whether I was shot or not, I scarcely knew. After that, however, with as fervid a 'Thank God!' as I ever uttered, I jumped sound and whole upon the floor, cutting the sole of my foot upon the shattered glass of the window

—but I did not find out that till afterward—struck a light, and then I saw how great was the peril that I had escaped! The large pane of glass in the lower part of the window was shattered, much of the glass was scattered over the counterpane of the bed, and there was an ugly wound in the wall just beyond the place where I had lain. All these impressions were flashed upon me, and I ran to the window, looked out and down, held out my flickering candle in the night, could see some dozen boards lying below, but nothing else. It was easy to surmise that the boards had been used as the rungs of a ladder placed between the two walls, and that it was by their means that the would-be assassin had reached my window. When I withdrew my head into the room, some one was rapping loudly at my door: my yell had aroused some of my neighbors, and waiters were hammering for admittance. I was glad to open the door to them: even the presence of the blanched waiters was a sort of relief to me. I saw that they took a curious interest in the whole affair, probed the hole which the pistol bullet had made, with their fingers, and seemed to derive some satisfaction from the fact that it had gone further than they could reach. Then they looked at me with admiration, as if I had done

something heroic. God knows how little of the hero I was, although I knew all the danger was over. I wouldn't have slept in that room again for a thousand pounds. I had my things taken to the top of the hotel. I saw that there was only one window there, and, after a little while, I fell into a sound sleep, frequented not even by dreams, until there was the knock for my bath in the morning, and then I started up with all the terrors of that terrible night upon me.

I had no patience to have by bath, and, before dressing for breakfast, I sent a telegram to Messrs Sorrenson and Teal explaining that I had been shot at, that I was in danger in Stockholm, and that I must leave it, with their permission, at once. Then I went and sponged my feverish excitement, had my coffee, but could not eat. I assure you that that day I was an object of considerable interest in the hotel; everyone wanted to converse with me—I should have thought for the purpose of hearing what I could tell of my curious night-adventure. But no: one voluble Frenchman talked to me for a quarter of an hour without waiting for an answer to any question—if he asked any—and seemed perfectly satisfied. Two gentlemen connected with newspapers desired interviews with me, and I have no doubt that, if I could

have adopted the descriptions of their picturesque pens, I might have made this my story more of a literary curiosity. The police, too, made numerous inquiries, got the bullet out of the wall, and seemed as proud of themselves as if they had clapped hands on the would-be murderer. But I never heard that anything came of their inquiries. It is odd how being an object of interest pleases one. I held my head higher all that day than was my wont; but I had no desire to add to my reputation by another such adventure, and, while I had to wait until six o'clock in the evening for a reply to my telegram, I had already made myself acquainted with all the means of quitting Stockholm that night, and by six o'clock I do not think there was anything left unpacked in my portmanteau, except my hair-brushes. You see I was still a young man. At six o'clock the reply reached me, and was to the following effect:—'Very sorry. By all means go to St. Petersburg at once. He may still be there; he was there recently.' And that was all.

The boat left for St. Petersburg that night at nine, and I set to work at once upon an excellent dinner, managed to shake hands with Ostberg before I left, and by ten o'clock I was in

the Baltic. The shudder as I thought of what might have happened—*that* shook the dust of the beautiful northern capital off my feet.

CHAPTER VII.

A FATAL RESEMBLANCE—A SURPRISE—ANOTHER WARNING—IN THE PRESENCE-CHAMBER OF DEATH—MY GUARDIAN ANGEL.

OF course I was not without some theory to explain the strange circumstances I have described. I could scarcely imagine that anyone cared to hate me enough to attempt my life. There was an easier hypothesis which explained the facts. I had been mistaken for some other body, and that other person had made deadly enemies. This was the only possible conclusion. The girl Alice Sergel, who did not bear me enmity, who had warned me of coming danger, and who had probably, I came to the conclusion, written the letter which had taken me to Christiania, and kept me there, out of harm's way, at least for a fortnight, had herself at first, at least, been deceived. It was evident I bore a fatal resemblance to someone. But, as I sat on the St. Petersburg boat, the

horrible idea occurred to me that I must be the facsimile of the man I was following! It was my strange interview with the woman in the Hornsgatan that forced this conclusion upon me. Everything that she had said, and that had seemed strange at the time, could be explained if she took me for Hare—the man I was asking about. Then it flashed upon me that Hare's christian name was George; and I sat there convicted of being a fool; and, as that was in the court of self, there was no possibility of appeal. But darker thoughts came to me. I remembered then, for the first time, the strange impression that I gathered from Messrs. Sorrenson and Teal that it was through Danescourt that Hare had become in the first instance associated with Nihilists and plotters. Was it possible that Danescourt had planned my death, and had, like the coward David, had me put in the front of the base battle, that he might not take my wife, but keep his own? It would be useless to tell you the hundreds of suspicions which came to me, and which, like foul birds, settled croaking on every branch of my thought.

The lights of Waxholm had gone down into the black waters of the Baltic, and the stars of heaven were above and around me, as the throbbing steamer pushed its way to the east.

The greatness of the black star-studded night, the infinite vistas which were open to my eyes, could not make me lose sight of that dear self which is the first consideration with all of us, and a terrible shudder passed through me, the very fellow of that which had come to me the night before, when I saw that livid face close to me, as I lay on my bed ; for I saw a black vista straight before me. I had thought safety lay in flight from Stockholm ; now I saw that I was running into the jaws of death ! I remembered that Hare had been mixed up with Nihilism. The letter I had had the day before from Sorrenson and Teal had said that he had made St. Petersburg too hot for him ; and I was walking into the furnace which he had heated seven times ! If I had not been convicted of consummate folly on the first count, conviction was certain on this. Everybody has at some time been invited by that devilish voice which suggests that it were better not to be, and at the instant I had some thought of slipping out of the troublous world, of shuffling off the mortal coil of folly in which I was entangled, by jumping overboard into the dark waters. It was only an instant ; the quiet eyes of the stars reproached me, and suggested that, besides the infinite starry heavens, there was another Eye upon

me, which looked for some stalwartness in a soul, and I put the thought from me. Still I was far from comfortable.

It was afternoon when we came in sight of St. Petersburg. The gilded dome of St. Izak seemed itself a little afternoon in the east. The lofty spire of the Admiralty towered up into the fine light from the very water's edge. We were opposite that populous part of the city called the Bassili Ostrov, and soon I had my feet upon the quay. I went at once to the Hotel Grand Duke, but had determined that it would be well, during my stay in St. Petersburg, to live as privately as possible, and I meant at once to seek some quiet lodging. One thing I had to do first—that was obvious—to make myself as unlike myself as I could.

I wore a moustache and whiskers, and I had a trick, perhaps most men who are proud of the first hair on their upper lip have, of fondling my moustache, and screwing the ends into sharp points. These I had determined must go, and the room to which I was shown in the hotel saw the fall of these embellishments. After the deed was done, I looked at myself with interest, but I was still surprisingly like myself. I changed the parting of my hair from the right to the left side; but it was curiously uncom-

fortable, and the transmogrification was infinitesimal. I did not know what change to make in my dress, for I could not tell what Hare wore. I then started to seek for lodgings. The hotel porter was good enough to give me some directions ; told me of some people, who spoke English, who let lodgings in a street answering to the curious name of Gorokhovaia Oulitzza, which I afterward ascertained meant Peas Street. As I made my way toward it, I was struck by the monotonous aspect of the architecture of the town. The streets and squares of houses seemed to be taking part in some stiff military maneuver. The lines were regular and unbroken : many of the houses, too, were built of wood. There were no quiet lanes to invite one : the streets were broad, and even in this hot summer day the place looked cold and formal. I found Peas Street with some difficulty, and the house to which the hotel-porter had directed me. It was true the landlady did speak English in a sort of way, and even that sort of way was pleasant to my ears. We soon came to terms, and that evening I was installed in my lodgings. The next day I wrote a full account of all that had happened, to my employers, gave them my address, and asked instructions. How, I asked, was I to discover

Hare, now that I was in St. Petersburg? Even the slender help which had been given me when I went to Stockholm, of knowing his address, had not now been supplied to me. I posted my letter after dark, keeping my hat well over my eyes, and then I returned to my lodgings. For some days I was thus careful and discreet, but the effect of great warnings quickly wears off young spirits, and the monotonous imprisonment grew irksome. The cooking of my landlady was not excellent, and I determined to go and have dinner at the Grand Duke Hotel. The hall-porter knew me as I entered, and walked up the handsome staircase. I ordered dinner, and had got half through it with enjoyment when the waiter came to me and asked if my name was Darnell?

At first I was so surprised that I forgot whether it was or not.

‘Why?’ I stammered.

Thereupon he said, ‘A letter,’ and handed me what proved to be a letter from Ostberg. I have not got that letter now among my various papers, but I remember its curious contents. My friend Ostberg was evidently very angry; was too obviously jealous. He accused me, with a wealth of expletives which did great credit to his English education, of having induced Alice

to accompany me to St. Petersburg. This, he said, was treachery. He had, he said, told me how he had known and loved the girl, and I—I had played him false all through; given him a false name, pretended never to have seen the girl before, even went so far in dissimulation as to ask him her name, and show him some writing which was not hers to throw him off the scent. And now I had gone away and robbed him of the girl. She might not have gone with me; but that she had followed me to St. Petersburg he knew for a fact. I have left out all that was irrelevant, although exceedingly expressive, in this letter. The announcement took me by surprise. That I was innocent of all he charged me with, I knew. But if it was true that this child or woman had followed me to St. Petersburg, was it not an odd, romantic chase?

I was following a man that I resembled too closely for my own safety, and on both our tracks followed a woman waif, who had loved and been wronged by the man I sought, and who took some curious interest in me, his living shadow. Men are very vain, but I felt that the girl's coming—if come she had—was a compliment. Still I dared not seek her: the risks I ran were too great. So I went back again to

my desolate lodgings, still too weary and to wait for the arrival of instructions from England. It was two nights, I think, after that, that I crept out after dark. I had made up my mind to go somewhere, see something, hear something which would distract my thoughts; for I admit that I was in a nervous, excited condition, certainly not expecting the adventure that I met with. I was in the Nevski Prospekt, and was fairly masked; for I had my hat slouched over my eyes, and my coat-collar as a wall about my cheeks. Suddenly I found myself confronted by a lad who barred my progress, and who said, 'Mr. Darnell, I believe?' At first I felt inclined to say 'No,' but there was not much use in telling the fib. The voice had something familiar to me in it, as the lad continued, 'Would you go with me a little way? I cannot speak with you here.' I was on my guard, suspicious, imagined that the youth was a decoy, and hesitated. He, however, seemed to understand my suspicion; for he continued, 'you need not be afraid: I am alone.'

I looked at the stripling, and thought that there could not be much danger in following him. Both the voice and the face seemed to be known to me, but I racked my memory in vain to tell me where I had seen him. I made up

my mind to follow, and said, in melo-dramatic phrase, 'Lead on.'

I followed through that great, wide, handsome street, through another and another: indeed, now I did not know where I was. My guide tripped on before, and I saw that he kept a very sharp eye upon all the people who passed us, and when he stopped we were in a quiet unfrequented street, badly lighted. Before this, however, the thought had occurred to me that the lad tripped too gracefully for the sex of his clothes. Was it possible that this was a woman? At first I thought this some common trick of one whose needs were possibly greater than her virtue. Then it occurred to me that he or she had mentioned my name, and further that I had seen the face and heard the voice before. But I had not long to wonder; for whenever we stopped, she said:

'We can speak here. You will forgive me for the liberty I have taken: it is for your own good. You are here in St. Petersburg. You bear a curious likeness to one who has made himself obnoxious to the police of this city, and who has other enemies even more dangerous. You have been mistaken for him by eyes which knew him well. You have already escaped great danger, but you are in greater danger

now. If you would be safe, return to England at once.'

Odd!—the words were the same as those used in the letter I had received at Stockholm.

'May I ask,' I said, 'to whom I am indebted for this warning?'

'What does that matter?' she said almost impatiently. 'I desire to do you a service. You are in imminent peril, and you quibble because you do not know who would save your life. We have not been introduced. What does it matter? I tell you your face is like that of one who is hunted, and you stop to inquire who I am!'

The foot beat with impatience on the ground, and I felt convinced that I was again warned of danger by the same girl who had stood my friend in Stockholm. 'I think,' I said, 'that notwithstanding your disguise, I recognize you. We met in Stockholm, did we not?'

'Why parley?' she said. 'Were it not for this disguise, I could not speak with you. If I did warn you before, did not my words come true? I tried to keep you out of the way of harm, and, like a moth, you came back to the flame, and how you escaped being singed or burned is a miracle. But you may not have such luck the next time. Believe me again, then, *leave Petersburg to-night!*'

At the instant, a figure intruded on the privacy of our darkness, looming in the faint light of a distant lamp. My companion had seen the approach of this stranger, whoever it might be, before I had.

‘Hist!’ she said. ‘Go! We are watched. Run!’

Before her hurried injunctions had fully been understood, she was gone, and the figure of some one approaching was becoming larger on me, as the distance lessened. I then acted on her advice, and showed my pursuer what, in some parts of the country, is called a ‘clean pair of heels.’

I reached my lodgings in safety, but not in comfort. The girl, who had known of my peril in Stockholm, had warned me of further danger here, had advised immediate flight. My nerves were shaken. Fear was beginning to lay hold of me like a fever. I had, in my last letter to my employers, informed them that I would remain in St. Petersburg until I heard from them. But there could be no harm in quitting it under the circumstances.

I might leave my address at the lodgings, and have letters sent on to me. So I sat and planned, little thinking of the sudden turn which would be given to affairs a few hours

later. I had just gone to bed, when a peremptory knock at my door made me ask 'who was there;' to which I received a very imperative answer, which was to me entirely unintelligible. Although I was beset by fears, I thought I had nothing to dread from those who knocked loudly at the door; it was *the windows* I feared. So I undid the fastening, and found myself standing opposite an inspector, if that is the right name, and two subordinates of the Russian police. The inspector addressed me with a volubility which was surprising, and, although I did not understand a word of what he said, I had not the least difficulty in coming to the conclusion that he meant to take me into custody. My surprise was unbounded, but I had to put on my clothes all the same. While I was doing so, the inspector went to my window, opened it, and spoke to some subordinate, or subordinates, for I think there were two, who were stationed below my window. It was evident that they had expected a desperate resistance when they brought five men to arrest me. Was this again a mistake in identity? That was the only possible explanation that occurred to me. I was taken immediately to a police station—I don't know what they call it in Russia—not far from where I had lodged. I

thought, from my fragmentary knowledge of English procedure, that I would be charged with some crime or misdemeanor, and that I would have an opportunity of explaining to some one who could understand me the mistake which had been made. But that was not the method in Russia. I was conducted to the door of a cell, which was ostentatiously studded with the heads of great nails. This being opened, I was projected or thrown into a cell, in which there was no light and very little of quite an early-vintage air. The walls oozed damp, and there was a clammy stone seat, and that, with the exception of a pitcher of water, which I upset in seeking for the settle, was the only furniture. I suppose it was twelve when I was incarcerated, and it must have been quite twelve hours before the light of day stormed my contracted pupils as I was led out somewhat roughly to be examined.

I have no object in making much of the horrors of those twelve dark hours. The place was noisome and fetid; rats scampered about in it, and came to close quarters with me. Altogether wretched and miserable was I, yet perhaps those were the luckiest twelve hours that I ever spent in my life. Somewhere I have read of a fly which was by the wind beaten

down upon the ruffled surface of a stream. There and then a hungry fish, seeing its poor paddling limbs, 'went for' that fly. But, at the same instant, a swallow, skating on swift wing, perceived the insect and slid on it. The fish and the bird arrived at the same instant. There was a collision, mutual aqueous and aerial recrimination; but the splash had enabled the poor fly to escape, and it went away upon its soaked wings. When I knew the truth, I felt that this fable told my story. I can only speak of what occurred at my lodgings after I left from what I heard from the police, for, as I have said, during these twelve hours I was deep in the cells of the police station. But the facts are beyond question. An hour or two after I had been taken by the police, a bomb had been thrown into the room in which I would have slept; the havoc it had played had been fearful. Everything in the room had been wrecked; the wall had been blown out. There was a gaping wound in the ceiling, the door had gone in splinters into the passage. My landlady, who had been in an adjoining room, had, I was informed, been seriously injured. But there seemed to be no doubt that the violent attention had been intended for me. When I was brought out of the cell, as I supposed about

noon, and taken before some *juge de paix*, the fact of the explosion seemed curiously enough to be the strongest evidence against me. The gentleman on the bench explained that I was accused of conspiring with others against his Imperial Highness. I asked, under what name I was charged ; and although, with the view possibly of covering contingencies, they had included a large number in the charge-sheet or indictment, I did hear the names of Hare, *alias* Darnell, *alias* Smith, *alias* Danescourt (that was odd) among others. It seemed very little use explaining that I was not the man they required, but I did so ; gave them all sorts of references, asked them to telegraph at my expense to certain persons who would vouch for me. This conduct, upon my part, staggered the magistrate ; but he asked me, as I understood him, how I got over the fact of the explosion ? If I was not Hare, why should the Nihilists try to kill me ? That seemed to be his argument. I could only asseverate my innocence, assure him that I had not been in Russia until within the last ten days, could not have been guilty of conspiracy, and so on. Now that I think of it, my defense seemed to have been very lamely conducted. I do not wonder now that I was sent back to the cells. But I

will say this for them, that they lodged me more comfortably upon the second occasion than they did on the first. I had some food given me, and some drink—the latter at a price somewhat disproportionate to its merit. But a reader in his or her easy-chair can have very little sympathy with me in my narrow cell in a prison in St. Petersburg. I do not know why I should dwell on those loathsome particulars: they make me creep and shudder now when I think of them. I was in custody for three days, and then I was liberated. I complained to those who set me free of the treatment I had been subjected to, but they evidently expected gratitude for having saved my life. And after all there was something to be said for their view; for not only had they saved me, but, looking upon me as a dangerous political person, they had taken possession of all my luggage, papers, and money, and had saved that too. These were returned to me; but the police did me another good turn. They told me to be off out of St. Petersburg at once; that there were other people in search of somebody like me, who wouldn't take three days to inquire into nice questions of identity. They also told me that a woman had been inquiring for me.

'Bold thing to do,' one of them said, 'as we

might have apprehended her. But what's the good of the law, if it cannot wink? She's living at the Grand Duke Hotel,' he added.

'And her name?' I asked.

'Ah, go along,' he said; but it was in Russian, and sly.

When I was liberated, I went at once to the Grand Duke Hotel and made inquiries for Alice Sergel. But I was informed that the lady had left. I bore in mind the warnings of the police, and even more vividly the hair-breadth escapes I had had. I was in fear of my life; and I need scarcely say that I quitted St. Petersburg in the course of a very few hours. My likeness to this man Hare was too perilous to admit of my remaining in haunts which he had been making hostile. I don't know exactly why I took a ticket for Berlin, but I did; and on my arrival there I telegraphed to Sorrenson and Teal, explaining that I could be of no use to them in their further search. I waited in Berlin two days for an answer, and, as none came, I left and made my way toward London *via* Paris. I was two or three days there, and again communicated with my employers, informing them of my whereabouts, and announcing my return to London.

It was the last day of my stay in Paris, and I

happened, as I walked the streets—it is wonderful how free I felt to go about now—to pass the Morgue. I had never been into that grim chamber; but now an irresistible curiosity to see that gaunt audience-chamber took possession of me, and I went in. I thought of all the grim life-dramas that had been ended here, the pitiful stories to which this blank put a finis, and I admit that my flesh crept a little as I went into the presence-chamber of death. An attendant was passing out at the doorway of the cold, damp place, for there was a clammy feeling as of the touch of death even in the air. I passed the man close, and we looked at one another; and I will swear he started, turned, and looked back at one of the chill shelves on which his dead charges lay.

‘Ah!’ he said, ‘*ma foi! un frere;*’ and he pointed with his finger to where his eyes had involuntarily gone. I felt bound to follow his direction, and I walked across the place to where the stiff outline of one body lay; and there, stretched in the rude dignity of death, lay a startling likeness of myself! I knew, in an instant, that I had here found the object of my search. There I had at last found Hare!

I never was superstitious; perhaps I am confessing to a fault, and not claiming credit

for a merit, but, without any superstition, I was strangely affected by the ghastly sight before me. He was so like me, that I felt as if there was some dim relationship between me and this dead man. I had walked scathless through perils which had been prepared for him: yet, although I had victoriously run his risks, there he lay, cold and stiff. Had I known all about his death in the cold river, perhaps I might not have been so much affected by it, but he came to me a corpse out of mystery; no one claimed any kindred with the poor clay, no one knew how he came by this sorrowful ending to his disheveled life. There he was, a corpse, secret as to the last scene in his career. As I looked at him, I found that the likeness swam in my eyes: it was the only tear, I suspect, that was shed for him, and perhaps in that tear there was more self-sympathy than there ought to have been. What could I do for the poor dead? I bought some cheap pale flowers, and laid them on him, and that was all.

When this trivial obsequy had been performed, I was turning to go away, when a strange faintness came over me. My eyes grew dim; the dead about me seemed to move, and I sank swooning, fainting, on the floor of that place, close to where that other dead self lay.

After that, I remember nothing, or next to nothing, for weeks. What I tell now is, as the lawyers say, 'hearsay,' but it is under the circumstances the best evidence I can produce. It appears that I was soon afterward found there beside the dead man, so like death, myself, that the question was, which was which? But my swoon or fit had not the restfulness of death about it; my lips were muttering. I was taken thence to a hospital, and from the hospital—by whose means I could make only conjecture—to some quiet clean lodgings, kept by an Englishwoman, who must have been kind to me, and a good nurse; otherwise I should not be alive now to tell the tale, but must have quickly attended Hare's funeral at my own. There I was attended by a physician who had some skill, but not enough, he said, to say from what disease I was suffering. That I had brain-fever he seemed to be assured, but that I had a great many other nosological arrows stuck about me, like a St. Sebastian, also seemed to be his opinion. When I was well again, he gratified me by inventing a new name for my malady. An invalid has a justifiable pride in having been a little original in his ailment. He was at any rate clear about that concerning which I myself had no doubt; and that was, that the fear and

anxieties of the past weeks had unhinged my brain, and for weeks, as I have said, I was delirious. I cannot throw much light upon my horrible dreams; no doubt such delirium would give a fine opportunity for a pen like De Quincey's. All the horrors of my past weeks were renewed and repeated in a hundred different shapes in these phantasmagoric hours. Dreams were in those days more real and solid to my disordered sense than the facts which appealed to my eyes and ears. I did not see the room in which I lay, the curtains which kept off the light; but I saw faces looking through the ghastly sheen of dark windows. I was in loathsome cells; I was in the midst of exploding bombs; I was dogged and hunted everywhere by men who were seeking my life; I was walking continually with another who was exactly like myself; but at times I had vague glimpses of the real world from, as it were, the windows of my disease, or between the tapestried curtains of my dreams. These glances at reality were only transitory, and were not distinguishable from the dream-thoughts which were my life. But at these times I had a consciousness that I was being waited upon by some gentle presence. For an instant or two, as I became conscious that a woman looked at me with quiet, kind eyes, or

drew the curtain, there was an infinite sense of peace and quiet; but anon I was back on the track, hunted as before by the dogs of disease, and the balm of the little lucid moment was forgotten.

When I came at length to myself, and lay there as weak as a child, I thought that the woman I had seen was only my good landlady, transfigured by my dreams; but no, I would not believe it, so when I had strength enough I asked for her. My landlady knew whom I meant at once. 'Ah!' she said, 'she is gone. But she did not go until quite lately. She is a good sister. The doctor says she saved your life more than he did. But she had to go away. She is good and kind.'

My sister! I had no sister. But I cried, I was so weak. Who had been my nurse all these weeks? Whose presence had been to my parched life like a shower to a thirsty June or torrid July?

'Ah!' she went on, 'she was good and kind; but be quiet, there's a good gentleman. Miss Alice wouldn't let him talk if she was here. Go to sleep now!'

She spoke to me as if I was a baby! Alice. Ah! now I guessed. It was my guardian angel,

who had been a sister of mercy to me. I cried myself to sleep.

It was a very long process, my recovery ; but at last I was, as the doctor said, a man again ; and I left my kind landlady, after having been under her roof for about two months, and after having been under the kind care of that good angel, yet possibly faulty woman, Alice Sergel, for many painful weeks. At the instant my gratitude had a curious look of love about it, yet I had my memories too, and was, in a chivalric sense, true to them all the while.

CHAPTER VIII.

BACK IN ENGLAND—REPORTING TO MESSRS. SORRENSEN AND TEAL—LIABLE TO BE TRIED FOR CONSPIRACY TO KILL.

BACK in England in September : a hot, dusty September that year. I reported myself to Messrs. Sorrensen and Teal in the city, and after calling twice without finding them in, I wrote a letter, and on my third visit they were both in the office to meet me. I think their conversation was as rambling as ever ; and when I remembered that they had informed me that the

credit of the firm was somehow involved in the recovery of the papers which Hare had had, it struck me as being a little curious how indifferent they were as to the whole matter of my mission. But it may be as well to report the conversation as far as I can remember it.

‘I am very sorry,’ I said, ‘that I was not successful in seeing you on Monday or Tuesday.’

‘Ah no!’ said Mr. Sorrenson, ‘but it did not matter. You have told us of all you have done.’

‘Not quite,’ I answered; for my last communication to the firm had been from Paris, before I had made my visit to the Morgue.

‘Ah!’ said Mr. Sorrenson, as if he was more interested in the mechanism of the hinge of his eyeglass, which he was examining, than in anything I could tell him. There was a pause, and then Mr. Teal said:

‘Pray go on.’

‘You remember,’ I said, ‘that I wrote to you from Stockholm that I discovered Hare had been there, that I was struck by the impression which I made on persons who had probably known him, and that I was, in consequence of a likeness, almost the victim of a foul murder?’

‘Yes,’ said Mr. Sorrenson, ‘you did write all that.’

'May I ask you,' I said, 'were you aware of my likeness to that man, Hare, when you saw me in this office in July?'

'Of course,' Mr. Sorrenson answered; 'no one can see you and not be struck with it, my dear sir!'

'You did not inform me of that fact when I asked you to describe the man to me.'

'No?' he answered, as if he were asking me a question.

'May I ask another question?' I added excitedly. 'Had my likeness to that man anything to do with my selection for the mission?'

'Probably!' Mr. Teal answered; 'but you will remember that you were selected for the mission, not by us, but by our good friend, Mr. Danescourt.'

There was something bitter in this sentence; but whether it was a latent spite against myself, or ill-will of Mr. Danescourt, which dictated it, I could not say.

'That is true!' I said, and I was brought to a sudden pause. Was it Danescourt that had planned my death? I remembered, God knows I had never forgotten, my midsummer's night-dream of love. It was as new and fresh to-day as ever. Had he guessed it? was he jealous? I had all this time been under the impression

that it was not my life which was aimed at by the pistol at Stockholm, by the bomb at St. Petersburg; but now on a sudden it flashed upon me that I was as much the intended victim as that poor man, Hare.

‘May I ask,’ I said, with a hot dry mouth, ‘if Mr. Danescourt was acquainted with Hare?’

‘Of course he was!’ answered Mr. Teal, still as bitter as gall. ‘It was through our good friend Mr. Danescourt that Mr. Hare entered our service.’

‘Good heavens!’ I cried foolishly; for at the instant I seemed to see everything in a new light, and that light seemed to be a flash of hell.

‘Vat did you say?’ asked Mr. Sorrenson, as if my words had been addressed to him.

‘Mr. Danescourt,’ continued Mr. Teal, when there was a pause made by my silence—‘Mr. Danescourt is very friendly to young men. But Mr. Hare did not merit his good opinion. Oh no! He is a very bad man, Mr. Hare.’

‘You sent Mr. Hare abroad,’ I said, ‘upon the business of the firm, did you not?’

‘That is so, and not so. It was on business of Mr. Danescourt’s that he went, but we did accredit him to our correspondents at various places. We did not know, we can swear, what matters he had in hand. Ah no!’

‘Was that course suggested to you by anyone?’

‘By our good friend, Mr. Danescourt, of course,’ answered Mr. Teal, as if the bitters of speech gave him an appetite for more.

‘You are sure of that?’

‘Quite. He entered our service that he might go to St. Petersburg.’

‘Did Mr. Danescourt tell you why he was anxious that Mr. Hare should quit England?’

‘Oh no! *Mr. Danescourt* did not mention. He was simply a young man in whom he took an interest. Mr. Danescourt has some curious business. That is not in our line at all, but he was intending to be friendly to that young man, no doubt.’

‘You lay emphasis on the name,’ I said. ‘You discovered from another source why it was that Mr. Danescourt was desirous that the good berth for his young friend should be at a distance?’

‘Did we?’ said Mr. Teal, slightly closing one eye.

‘You were telling *us* what happened to you?’ said Sorrenson.

‘Ah, so I was!’ I said, seeing that it would be no use to ply them with further questions at present, but watching for my opportunity as a

cat watches a mouse-hole. 'You remember my letter from St. Petersburg?'

'Oh yes!'

'And you learned that again my life had been in imminent peril?'

'That is so.'

'And you knew,' I said, raising my voice, for I was angry at the diabolical conspiracy of which I had been the intended victim, 'that my life was in that peril because of my likeness to the man Hare, and yet you never warned me. You let me go on exposing myself to danger, which a word from you might have enabled me to avoid. Do you call that conduct worthy of men of honor?'

'Every man's life is in danger in such countries,' said Mr. Teal, but I thought he spoke under a sense of discomfort. 'Besides, it was not we; it was your friend, Mr. Danescourt.'

'Leave me,' I said, as full of words as a choked winter stream is of water; 'leave me to settle with Mr. Danescourt. I say it was you—you entered into a foul conspiracy to expose the life of a man who had done you no wrong to danger, to death; and you are as guilty as he is.' There was rather an impressive pause, and then I continued, 'Do you know, gentlemen, that you have put yourselves within the

reach of the strong arm of the law—that you are liable to be tried at the Old Bailey for conspiracy to kill?’

I here professed a more intimate knowledge of the criminal law of England than I possessed or possess. I would not have that statement taken as an authoritative dictum : still, it served its purpose. My hearers were evidently uncomfortable ; possibly they had been thinking over the matter before.

‘My goot sir!’ said Mr. Sorrenson, giving more attention to me than to his eyeglass.

‘Do moderate your anger, my good sir,’ said Mr. Teal. ‘It was of great importance to our firm that that man should be found and made to hand over the papers which were in his possession. We never concealed from you the fact that he had mixed himself up with conspiracies and plots.’

‘But it is your conspiracy and plot I am speaking of,’ I continued, keeping my voice pitched high, that the clerks in the outer office might hear that it was not an ordinary interview. ‘My whole danger lay in my likeness to that man, and you never warned me. We will see how you will defend yourselves when this comes to be inquired into.’

‘Indeed, indeed,’ said Mr. Teal, now thor-

oughly frightened, 'you must not go on so! As I said, it was all Mr. Danescourt's doing.'

'To tell you the truth,' said Mr. Sorrenson, with what struck me as a cleverly happy inspiration, 'I did think you were Mr. Hare's brother.'

'Oh, indeed!' I said.

'Yes, that is so. You were so very like.'

'And you thought that I would, in all probability, ask you for a description of the personal appearance of my own brother.'

'Ah, you might have had motives of your own,' said Mr. Teal, gallantly following his partner's lead, 'for keeping us in the dark. Your name was different, you know.'

'This will not avail you, gentlemen,' I said, a little puzzled by the plausible turn the conversation was taking; 'but we will settle this matter hereafter. I believe that you and your good friend, Mr. Danescourt, have not only aimed at the life of that poor man Hare, but at mine too. I will be at the bottom of this diabolical conspiracy, in which I suppose that from my long silence you concluded you had succeeded.'

'Ah, we did think something had happened,' said Mr. Teal. 'We were quite relieved to get your letter the other day.'

‘Relieved!’ I said with angry irony; ‘relieved to find that you had not any blood on your hands—that all your bullets had missed their mark! Oh yes! But I will be at the bottom of this devilish murder-plot yet, and I will then have my revenge on you and Mr. Danescourt too. But,’ I continued, getting calmer, for storms wear themselves out, ‘I came here to-day to give you an account of my stewardship.’

‘Ah, of course,’ said Mr. Sorrenson, ‘an account of your stewardship. Very well put, very well expressed, my dear sir. Will you go on?’

They were, both of them, all attention now, as I continued my narrative. I think they were frightened.

‘I told you,’ I said, ‘that after a hair’s-breadth escape in Stockholm, I went to Petersburg, and that there I fell under the suspicion of the police, my fatal likeness again being the cause; and no wonder, for as I was upon Hare’s track I was in his haunts, and it was easy to make the mistake. Not only did the police fall into the error, but the villains with whom Hare had been associated in deeds of crime—possibly you accredited him to them—also mistook me.’

‘Anything that the firm can do to make up to you for the danger you ran, and for the incon-

venience you suffered, Mr. Darnell,' said Mr. Teal, 'I am sure I speak with Mr. Sorrenson's approval, we will be too pleased to do.'

'That is so,' said Mr. Sorrenson.

'Well,' I continued, 'you know how, when I was sent for, in the spirit, to curse the spies of St. Petersburg as my enemies, I came to bless them altogether, for my arrest saved my life.'

'Very remarkable,' said Mr. Sorrenson, thinking he was flattering me.

'It is like a romance,' said Mr. Teal, again following his senior partner's lead.

'It is pleasanter to hear about than to go through,' I remarked; 'but when I was again at liberty, with some admirable official advice to get out of Russia, and not to run my neck into nooses, I came back to England by Berlin and Paris.'

'I think,' said Mr. Teal, 'that you have done all that the firm could expect.'

'Except lose my life,' I said.

'My good sir!' said the one.

'My good sir!' said the other.

'I cannot,' I said, 'deceive myself. There was only one object in sending me abroad—in supplying me liberally with money—and that was that I might tread in the footsteps of a man who had been making every place he had

frequented too hot for him. You, a firm of merchants, connived at the murder of a man you had never seen. I do not know,' I said, with what seemed to me at the time scathing irony, 'what commission you got on my life.'

I fear I have reported too minutely a conversation which, the reader will understand, had considerable interest for me, but may have very little attraction for him. It did not end where I have ended the report. After that, these two gentlemen were metaphorically on their knees to me, asking me to believe that they had never anticipated evil would come of the mission, and almost in the same breath making liberal offers by way of compensation to me, and throwing all the blame—if blame there was—upon their good friend, Mr. Danescourt.

I walked away from the office, having made no compromise, still talking largely, and a little at large, about conspiracy and the criminal law, but somehow having an idea that the conspiracy to take my life had added dignity to the commodity. A life which is worth taking, I thought, must be worth something.

Still one thing was certain—that matters could not rest where they were.

CHAPTER IX.

THINKING OVER THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF MY
SEARCH—TRYING TO UNRAVEL THE MYSTERY
—A GLIMPSE OF A FAMILIAR FACE.

HOW was I to act? How was I to unravel the mystery which had surrounded me ever since I had been unlucky enough to find my name on the short list of the Explosives Insurance Company—and the other mystery which had surrounded Hare? At first I thought it would be well to go to Danescourt, and accuse him to his face. Then I remembered that the motive of it all must be some mystery of which I, as yet, knew nothing. Surmises flew about in my head as birds do in the summer. Had his wife loved that man to whom I had given the violets in Paris? Had Danescourt first planned his death, and then tried to thrust me into his grave? That I resembled him was beyond doubt, and that theory might account for the favor she had shown me. Had Hare himself been done to death by Danescourt? Had it been through that man that he had got entangled in the coils of conspiracy—that he had become the shuttlecock between the

battledores of the plotters and the police? Should I take the police into my confidence? One consideration negatived that. My anger toward, and my hatred of, Danescourt were not greater than—it looks fearful to write it—my love for his wife. I dared not have even thought to myself that I harbored such an affection, but for his diabolical conspiracy. It was evident to me that I must make no public fracas. I must keep the whole matter secret until I knew more. But how was I to find out anything? I remembered now, for the first time, that Dr. Dowdeswell knew something of the Danescourts. It was at his house at Weybridge that I had first met Mrs. Danescourt, and then, I cannot tell how, an insatiable curiosity took possession of me to know her Christian name; for, without rhyme or reason, as one would say, I came to believe, or half believe, that it was she who had written the letter to me which had reached me in Stockholm. I had it in my pocket-book now, but up to that instant, notwithstanding Ostberg's opinion to the contrary, I believed that that letter, like the other, was written by Alice Sergel, who had shown such a curious interest in my safety.


When I thought over the circumstances of my search in the early summer for the woman

whose influence had gone straight to my heart, I came to the conclusion that Dr. Dowdeswell had only pretended to assist me in my search for her. Another surmise hung in the atmosphere of my thought. Was it not possible that he had confined me in his madhouse that one night that I might lose the appointment, and so the more easily fall into the villainous trap Danescourt had set for me? I remembered, too, with a sense of satisfaction, that I had at any rate a rod in pickle for Dr. Dowdeswell. He had tampered with the liberty of a British subject. The first thing I did was to visit the office of the Commissioners in Lunacy, in Whitehall Place, and I had there a conversation with one of their clerks, which strengthened my hands materially; and, thus fortified, I determined to begin my inquiries at The Lawn, Weybridge.

I seem to have been, for several years at least, a sort of ball, tossed about, as it were, from one racquet to another, from chance to chance—now faring ill at the hands of circumstances, through no demerits of my own, and at other times being unduly favored by events. I suppose that every man has streaks of good and bad luck.

I was on my way to the station to go and visit

The Lawn, when I heard a hearty voice say, 'Hullo, Darnell!' and turning, I found myself opposite Mr. Markby. 'I am very glad to see you,' he said, with an open, candid air which surprised me, for I must confess that I had persuaded myself that the Markbys were in the plot against me. That they knew of Danescourt's designs, and helped him, was at any rate a good working hypothesis, and accounted for most of the facts. It was at the dinner Danescourt had given at his club that I first met Mr. Markby. His quick appreciation of my good points had at the time seemed curious, and his invitation to dinner was an extension of courtesy to a stranger, which, even then, when I was not on the *qui vive* of suspicion, took me by surprise. If this was all done to oblige a man of Danescourt's importance and position, I could understand it. The more we see of life, the lower we think men's motives are. To be a man of the world is to ascribe every action to a base cause. I had had my lessons in worldliness, and might almost have graduated; but my hopeless love had kept me from embracing that hopeless creed in its entirety. However, as I said, I suspected Mr. Markby. It was through him and his wife and sister that I had gone to The Lawn. I could not now, in the lurid light of later events,



believe that my detention there was fortuitous. I say, then, that his frank greeting rather shook the foundations of my strongest suspicions. Had I been really quite worldly, I would have suspected him all the more that he seemed candid. That is the rule. Worldliness regards virtue as the cleverest of tricks.

‘So you have got back?’ he said.

‘Yes,’ I answered, trying to be frosty even in the presence of his beaming geniality.

‘We owe you more than apologies,’ he continued, without taking any cognizance of the keenness of my speech; ‘we have heard of the misfortune into which we conducted you, will you let us ask your forgiveness? Come and dine with us to-day; we shall be alone, but it will enable us to make our peace.’

For an instant I was on the point of declining. I thought that this might be the beginning of some new plot against my liberty or my life. The shots that had been fired at me had made me alert. Was I like a fool to run into the snare again? What was the good of having paid toll to experience—heavy toll, almost my life—if I was to go and run myself aground on the same shallows? But, on second thoughts, I argued that I was throwing away a chance if I refused. Now I was forearmed against any trap.

I felt I could not be easily taken in a second time. It is an observation I have made, and the reader who reads for the story and not for the observations will forgive me for making it here—that the fool is always willing to admit his folly in the past, and never feels it in the present. To concede it about yourself of some years ago, is like blaming someone else. I therefore acted on my second thoughts and accepted the invitation. I thought I saw openings to inquiry, and I was not wrong.

After the coldness of the spring of our meeting, I put on the best and warmest manner I could toward the middle and close of our little street-interview. We parted genially. I abandoned my visit to Weybridge for the day, and returned early to my rooms to dress for my dinner in Harley Street. When invitations are rare, a man is generally too early rather than too late, and I started to walk to Harley Street at least three-quarters of an hour before the late dinner-hour that Mr. Markby had mentioned. I am the last person to say that likenesses may not deceive even those who know folk well; but I was certain I was not deceived. As I walked up Regent Street I saw, I could swear, the same face that had unintentionally greeted me in Stockholm, and that had, with all its long hair

tucked under a boy's cap, looked beseechingly and warningly into mine in the dark and dangerous streets of St. Petersburg, that had looked in full of tenderness on my fever-dreams. But it was only a glimpse I had of it. I looked that I might follow, that I might accost her, that I might thank her, as she deserved to be thanked, for having guarded and at last saved my life. But she had disappeared in the dusk of the evening, and I felt lonely after that.

CHAPTER X.

PLEASANT REVERIES—SOME NEW DISCOVERIES—
BORN 'INTO THE PURPLE' OF A BIG CITY
FIRM—I WENT HOME, BUT NOT TO SLEEP.

IT was a very pleasant little dinner. When I look back on the pleasant times one has spent with three or four people round a table, when congeniality was the matrix in which conversation moved, I wonder at the exaggeration of hospitality which gathers greater numbers about the board. Can you remember a bottle of wine which was not a secret service, like confession, but was partaken of in the open intercourse of a great party? I don't know how

it is, there are no social relations when there are more than three or four. When there are crowds, there is no give and take. It may be oratory when one man will force his vile stuffs down your throat, for the vanity of his own and the vexation of your spirit, but it is not conversation. This evening I remember well. It was communism in talk. There was no dictator, no gentleman who, like Carlyle, made a *coup d'état* of the other talkers that he might rule alone, and issued edicts after that. Each spoke, and each listened. I told the story of my adventures, thrilling enough in their way, and they listened with interest. But I also asked questions, and elicited as much information as I gave. It would be a poor requital for that courtesy to try and repeat the conversation; it cannot be decanted with advantage, any more than champagne. When Mr. Markby and I were alone, conversation took less pleasant by-paths, but the words are more easily remembered. When we were again seated, and had filled our glasses, I said abruptly:

'I know you are a friend of Mr. Danescourt. Would you mind telling me something about him?'

'Something about him?' he replied. 'What do you want to know? Some one said that

happy countries had no history: I believe that fortunate men have no biographies. Danescourt has been very fortunate. He was born "into the purple" of a big City firm. He was clever enough to continue the success which had been established before he was born. He was well educated at Harrow and Oxford; has been a good deal abroad. What more is there to tell?'

'But he, like other men,' I said, drawing a bow at a venture, 'has had his romance.'

'Yes, that is true,' said Mr. Markby, sighing good-naturedly, as a man will after dinner, when he is at peace with himself and mankind. 'Yes, no doubt, there are skeletons in most cupboards.'

'His wife is very beautiful,' I said.

'Yes,' he said, 'she is pretty; but after all it would be better if men chose women for the comeliness of their hearts rather than for the prettiness of their faces.'

'Do you mean,' I said, trying to restrain myself, for I felt that his words were an insult to Mrs. Danescourt and to me (why to me?)—'do you mean that Mrs. Danescourt—is——'

'No, I don't,' he said, interrupting before he had heard my question; 'all I meant to say was that it is best to let hearts make the marriages

instead of heads. I believe weather used to do more for the crops than all our modern man-ures.'

'Would you mind telling me a little more?' I said. 'You cannot tell how nearly this matter touches me: I will explain how afterward.'

'You don't mean to say that you are?—but no, you would not want an explanation if you were. But it is no secret. I can tell you all I know—not very much after all. Danescourt, when he left college, saw, somewhere in the country, a very pretty girl, the daughter of a clergyman who was as poor as a church mouse, and rich enough not to be ashamed of his poverty. Well, he fell in love with her, but too late. She had given her heart to another, and that other was a ne'er-do-weel, as the Scotch say. It is odd how some women squander the treasures of their hearts upon some quite unworthy being, making their love a charity, which perhaps it always is. She had loved that man; he had pretensions to good looks, but was quite unworthy of a noble woman's love.'

'Do you know the man's name?' I asked. Why I asked the question I do not know, for at the instant it had flashed upon me that his name was Hare?

'No,' he said; 'I heard it, but I do not

remember it.' Then after a pause he added, 'I do not know how far I was justified in telling all this, but I fear it is no very great secret; and if you had not heard it from me, you could have heard it from another. Danescourt is a man of strong will, and when strong will is in the plot with strong love, it is pretty sure to succeed. I never knew the particulars; it is some years ago now, but by some trick or ruse he got rid of the old lover, and induced the girl to believe he was dead, and then he persuaded her to marry him. But, after all, fraud does not prosper. Not long after her marriage, his wife discovered that she had been trapped at the altar. She discovered that her old lover was alive; she had learned that he was unworthy of her love, but the unworthy trick by which he had been deprived of it was worse than all demerit. She had never loved Danescourt: now she hated him. As I said, it is a good illustration that evil will not turn to good. Danescourt kept a brave face to the world, but men saw, for all that, that he was a disappointed man. Nothing can be worse, to my thinking, than for a man and woman, who ought to love one another, to live together in as close bands as love could dictate, but without love. The Nemesis had not done yet. His wife dwelt

upon her wrongs ; and as she had no love to keep her heart sweet, she lost her reason.'

'What! was she mad?' I asked eagerly.

'Well, I suppose she was, but she was never sent to an asylum. She was perfectly quiet. Still she was suffering from what they call nowadays, nervous disease. And Danescourt had the satisfaction of feeling that it had been his cleverness which had brought on his wife's illness.'

'Is she still insane?' I asked, and I tried to keep all the sadness I felt out of my voice.

'Well, I don't think I ought to have said insane. Sometimes no doubt she is better, sometimes worse ; but you ought to go and ask Dowdeswell about it, if you are not afraid to go to The Lawn again. Most people, who had not known her as she used to be, would scarcely detect anything strange in her.'

'Have the husband and wife learned to love one another?' I asked.

'Ah, no. That's the worst of it,' he said with a sigh ; but although I pressed him to continue his confidences, he would say no more.

His words had thrown light upon much that was before dark, but he had still left me in doubt and mystery by his last words and sigh : 'that's the worst of it.' The words in them-

selves might not mean much, but the tone and the whiff seemed to imply more than they did, and if there had not been something behind, why had he remained implacable to all my questions?

I left the house, and wandered in the hot still evening about the streets, thinking over all I had heard. Why, if Danescourt did not love his wife, had he attempted my life? Had her old love's mantle fallen upon me, and did that account for the soft words she had spoken, for that letter she had written? For a strange idea possessed me, that the letter I received at Stockholm, with the signature obliterated, had been written by her. Now I could understand Danescourt's anxiety to get Hare out of the country; I could understand his trying to involve him in plots of treason. But why should he send me on his perilous tracks? Did he hope still to win her love? and did he think that my presence might be an obstacle? He had not hesitated to win a wife by a trick; was he likely to hesitate if he saw a chance of securing her love by a murder?

But mad! That was the thought that made me so sad, so sorry. When I had discovered that she was married, I could still think of her with respectful adoration; and the very clearing

of my heart from all love by means of duty only strengthened the hold that love had. But now, how could I love a mad woman? I felt more lonely and desolate without the love that night, than I had done even in all the perils I had passed through. There is no loneliness like that of an empty heart.

While these thoughts had been revolving in my head, my steps had wandered purposelessly. I was walking because I could not rest; but suddenly I was recalled from the inner chamber of my head, to the threshold, by someone passing me, and looking up into my face. But she was gone before I recognized her, and I felt as if I had parted from a friend. Then looking up, strangely enough, I found I was standing opposite Danescourt's house. I stood there long, until the squares of light which marked the windows had disappeared, and then I went home, but not to sleep.

CHAPTER XI.

RECALLING UNPLEASANT CIRCUMSTANCES—MORE
ABOUT THE DANESCOURTS—A CONFESSION—A
HARMLESS JOKE—A CURIOUS CASE.

THE next day I paid my visit to The Lawn, and I found Dr. Dowdeswell at home, fortunately.

‘My dear fellow,’ he said, in his effusive way (those men who show warmest on the surface do not give the most heat; they are like open fires—only one-seventh of the heat comes to you, six-sevenths are secretly conveyed up the chimney; still it is nice to look at),—‘my dear fellow, I am delighted to see you. How have you been? I heard you had gone abroad; glad you have come back. Very kind of you to come and see me. You’ll stay to lunch, there’s a good fellow.’

But I had a stern purpose in me, which was not to be balked by his puff-pastry manners, so I said:

‘Dr. Dowdeswell, you will remember that I once slept in this house.’

‘Of course I do, my dear friend; but don’t recall that unpleasant circumstance. I thought

you had forgiven that foolish mistake long ago. Come !' and he laughed.

'Was it a mistake?' I asked, without responding to his merriment.

'A mistake?' he repeated, I thought uncomfortably. 'Of course you don't think that I kidnapped you on purpose? I don't want patients who do not pay, my good fellow. No doubt it would have added to my reputation if I could advertise that I had cured you in a night, but that would have been a breach of etiquette,' he added, still simmering with laughter.

'Have you still got the attendant or keeper—I don't know what you call him—who locked me up, in your service?' I drew a bow at a venture, but my arrow hit.

'What! you haven't been tampering with him?' he said.

Ah, the fussy little man had confessed. I saw I had him in my power, but I had no intention of exposing him or of extracting damages. I wanted him to tell me all he knew about the Danescourts; but it might have been a breach of professional etiquette, if I had not had a means of making him open his mind to me. No doubt a threat is in the nature of a jemmy, but even a burglar's tool may be of use upon occasion.

‘You need not know,’ I said, ‘how I discovered the plot.’

‘My dear fellow, don’t use such ugly words. Plot! I assure you—’

‘I know,’ I went on, ‘who instigated you to waylay and trap a guest; and I know that the gentlemen who sit at Whitehall Place would take a serious view of such practical jokes.’

‘D—n it, sir,’ said the doctor, showing the somewhat coarse wood of which he was made under the veneer, ‘you haven’t been to the Commissioners in Lunacy, have you?’

‘I have,’ I answered.

‘What good will that do you?’ he asked, speaking thickly; ‘unless you want revenge, and why revenge yourself on me? I bore you no ill-will, and did you no harm. You say you know who did. Why not revenge yourself on him? If you have told the Commissioners, it will ruin me,—ruin me and all because I played a harmless joke. He assured me it was only a joke. Good heavens! you wouldn’t ruin me, would you?’

‘I have no wish to ruin you,’ I said, feeling some compunction for the little man; ‘and I may say that I have said nothing about it to the Commissioners as yet.’

‘But you said you had been there,’ he said, with an air of relief, but still nervously.

‘I went there to make some inquiries, but I mentioned no names.’

‘Well, what do you want of me? Money?’

‘No, I don’t want money. I want you to tell me all you know of the Danescourts.’

‘Ah!’ he said with a sigh. ‘The Danescourts, is that all? Well, I can do that. I think Mr. Danescourt has not behaved well to me. He assured me that it was all a practical joke, and now, well, it isn’t a joke at all.’ (There was a thin smile here.) ‘Then he did not take my advice about the nurse, and I think did very wrong in that respect. Yes, I’ll tell you all I know; but you must stay to lunch, my good fellow.’

‘Would you mind telling me all you know?’ I said, a little impatiently, as if I was still holding the rod over him.

‘Certainly! It is not very much,’ he said, as he seated himself, and motioned me to a chair. When I was seated, he put his fingers together, as if he was giving me an object-lesson in the Gothic arch, and continued as follows:—‘It is some years ago now, that Mr. Danescourt consulted me as to his wife’s health. He told me then, that, before their marriage, she had been

in love with a young man who had proved unworthy, and that his wife fretted about him now. Mr. Danescourt is a man of sense, and saw that there was no harm in being candid about matters that I was certain to find out for myself. He admitted that he imagined his wife had still some affection for the scapegrace. She was, he said, in an exceedingly nervous condition.'

'Was she mad?' I asked.

'No, I cannot say she was mad. I went and saw her; and she has been my patient, more or less, ever since. A most attractive woman. It was because she was so finely strung, that she went out of tune; that was all. She never has been mad, but she has been on the verge of it. But for me, she might have fallen into the abyss, although I say it.'

His fussy egotism did not offend me so much now. I encouraged him to go on.

'I never saw a prettier woman; and pretty women do not, as a rule, go insane. There is always something repulsive in the face of the lunatic. But she never was insane; she may have got the credit of it, but that was only because I was attending her. That is where these neurologists have the pull over us: they go to hundreds of cases of insanity; for people like insanity to be called nervous disease. But if we

go to one case of nervous disease, it is dubbed insanity. That is why we are left out, while these nerve-doctors are called in.'

There was genuine feeling in what he said ; and as I imagine that there is some truth in his statement, I have intentionally left out the names of the physicians that he mentioned in that uncomplimentary category. Still the matter did not interest me, and I only let him go on because I thought his divagations would perhaps, after all, be the shortest way to the goal.

'It was a curious case,' he continued ; 'very. She has been half well and half ill ever since. But there was a wonderful and curious remission of the disease in June last, which has continued up to the present time.'

'Do you mean to say that she is well now?' I asked, perhaps too eagerly.

'My dear friend,' he said, 'Mr. Danescourt will have reason to complain of you if you blaze out like that. But for the bad character the former lover of Mrs. Danescourt had, I could have imagined that you were the man.'

'I am not the man,' I said half sorrowfully, envious of poor Hare only in the love that had been lavished on him, and not of his horrible fate. 'Are Mr. and Mrs. Danescourt very much attached to one another?'

‘N—o! I think I never saw a man more in love with his wife than Danescourt was, and perhaps is. But I do not think his wife has ever forgotten the old love that was in her heart.’

‘To what do you ascribe her partial recovery in June last?’

‘Ah, that puzzles me! There has been a remarkable change in her. She is, and has been since my unfortunate party—I don’t like to recall it—almost well. By the way, you may have seen her here, for she was among the guests that night.’

‘She was not among the guests you mentioned to me when I made inquiries of you.’

‘Perhaps not,’ he said. ‘I looked upon her as a patient, and I didn’t think it was possible that you would fall in love with a married woman, and you were too evidently in love with the object of your search. You have a candid manner, Mr. Darnell, which makes reading easy even to runners.’

‘Will you explain how you came to conspire against my liberty with Mr. Danescourt?’ I said, neglecting the compliment or the sneer.

‘Nothing easier. He came to me and told me that he had a particular friendship for you, that you were coming to the party, and that I

was why he refused my nurse. Did you ever hear of such a thing?’

‘What?’ I cried with astonishment.

‘Yes, I don’t wonder you are surprised,’ he continued. ‘She is a very good-looking woman, no question of that; but imagine selecting such a woman for your wife’s maid. Shocking!’

‘Are you quite certain of this?’ I asked; for I could scarcely believe that a man who cared for his wife—and it seemed to be admitted on all hands that Danescourt did care for his—could do such a thing.

‘There is no question about it—I have it on good authority; and, what is more, the woman is jealous of Mrs. Danescourt, I can see that.’

‘Are you sure that Mr. Danescourt still loves his wife?’ I asked.

‘No doubt about that either; although it is rather an odd way of showing it—isn’t it? It is because he loves her, and does not care for that woman, that the latter is jealous. That is my interpretation. I will swear the woman hates Mrs. Danescourt. Well, he might have had one of my best nurses, and she would have carried out my orders to the letter. But he said he had more confidence in this woman. Could you believe it?’

‘Do you still attend Mrs. Danescourt,’ I asked, for I wanted to believe that he was in error.

‘Yes, I go there occasionally; and she is almost herself again, and there will be no recurrence of the disease now, I think. Still, I would not answer for her if that old love were to turn up. Not that she cares for him now; she is a woman of very high principle, and she has taught her heart not to care for him, since she knew he was a blackguard. If Mr. Danescourt had only allowed her own conscience to play his game for him, instead of tricking her into marriage, she would never have been ill at all. I have told him so a hundred times. Now come and have some lunch.’

CHAPTER XII.

HALF HAPPY AND HALF SAD—A DEATH—ANOTHER
SURPRISE—AN ARREST—A VERY SERIOUS MATTER
—THE MYSTERY DEEPENS.

I WAS in a dazed condition as I made my way back to town—half happy and half sad. I was convincing myself that Danescourt's conduct was such as to make my affection for his wife a kind of virtue; not that I was wicked enough to think of speaking of my love to that pure, good woman, but I felt that I might keep it, as a precious treasure, at my heart. That gave me pleasure: a man with a love is not friendless. I was sad, too, to think of that woman's curious lot. That she was loved by a man who had tricked her into marriage; who had by some subterfuge got rid of her worthless lover; who had plotted and planned against the life of another man who had done him no harm, but who had the misfortune to resemble his wife's first love; who had not hesitated to place *such* a woman in charge of his wife,—that seemed to me a deplorable thing. But all my feelings did not tell me what I ought to do. I had an account to settle with that man,

Danescourt: I must call him to account for having planned my death. Should I put the whole matter in the hands of the police? That would be an injury to her, as well as to him. I wanted my revenge, but I hesitated to take it by violence. I made up my mind, but not without difficulty, to go to him, and lay the whole black story of his crime before him, and to pardon him for the sake of his wife—a very lame and impotent conclusion, you will say. But I thought it would have a sting in it, beyond the poignancy of feeling that he had plotted in vain; and that, while poor Hare with his shattered character was dead, I was there, contrary to his hopes, alive and well. But I did not trust Mr. Danescourt; and although I thought he was too astute a man to attempt violence with his own hands, I deemed it expedient to be fore-armed. I had gone through all the perils I have spoken of without any instrument of defense. When I made up my mind to call on Mr. Danescourt in Grosvenor Crescent, I bought a revolver. That was the day after I had seen Dr. Dowdeswell at The Lawn; but I did not call on Mr. Danescourt then—indeed, I never did.

It was on the evening following that day that the newspapers announced the mysterious

death of a gentleman. But, although I saw the large-lettered announcement, I did not read the paragraph. My attention might have been called to it the next morning; but before I had time to look at the newspaper, I was informed that there were two policemen who wanted to see me. I was surprised, but not half so much as when they entered the room and informed me that they had a warrant for my arrest, and that I was suspected of the murder of Mr. Danescourt.

‘Danescourt!’ I cried. ‘Is he dead?’

‘I warn you,’ said the policeman considerably, ‘that whatever you say may be used against you. You aren’t bound to say anything.’

‘But I shall,’ I said. ‘Tell me, is Mr. Danescourt dead?’

‘Oh, come,’ said the constable, closing one eye.

‘Do tell me!’ I said impatiently.

‘Yes, he’s dead,’ said the man, as if he was humoring me. ‘Come along.’

‘But why on earth am I suspected? I’ve not seen the man for months.’

‘Well, it’ll be the easier for you to clear yourself,’ said the man. ‘Duty’s duty.’

‘Well,’ said the other, ‘you know you had a spite against the gentleman.’

'Yes, and you bought a pistol only two days ago,' said the first. 'But come along; you'll hear all about it soon enough.'

'Was Mr. Danescourt shot?' I asked.

'Ah, that's the mystery,' said the man, shutting one of his eyes again; and as I perceived that they had made up their minds that I was guilty, and knew more about the affair than they did, it was no use probing them with questions any more, and earning for myself the reputation of a 'downy one.'

So I prepared myself, and went with them, as the police say, 'quietly.'

I do not suppose the reader would care to hear what happened to me. The suspicion of the police may have been justified, for they had ascertained from Messrs. Sorrenson and Teal that I had every reason to dislike Mr. Danescourt, that I had threatened to be revenged on him, and they had also ascertained that I had purchased a revolver. They put those things together, and got a warrant for my arrest. But when the matter came to be inquired into, it was seen that, damning as these circumstances might be, they would not account for the circumstances of Danescourt's death. He had gone to bed apparently in good health, and he was found dead in the morning. There were

no signs that violence had been used. The house had not been entered in the night; a medical man had been called in in the morning, and had examined the corpse. He said that Mr. Danescourt had been dead for some time. Now, under these circumstances, the police suspicion appeared to the magistrate to have been a little too acute, and I was discharged. I think justice made some kind of apology to me, but I was so full of my own thoughts that I did not hear it. When I left that court 'without a stain upon my character,' I was more of a murderer than I had ever been in my life. I knew my duty was to sorrow for the dead man, and to condemn the unknown criminal; but, for the life of me, I could not! I felt sympathy with the latter. God forgive me, but I felt glad the man was dead. Even at the instant hope was blooming in my heart with the lush luxuriance and fragrance of a bank of violets under the magic of May! I who had just been in the hands of the police, and ought to have held down my head and felt ashamed to look a fellow-man in the face—I would have been at another time—I walked as if the hard stones in the Strand had been air.

But I had a struggle with myself. I tried to put away all thoughts of the future. I was not

going to make the baked meats of my mind which were furnished for the poor man's funeral do for the marriage of his widow. But, do as I would, I felt that I had a great reserve capital of joy. I never doubted that she would come to love me in time. Only one thing dragged that fine dawn, and that was the sorrowful face that I saw in the court—the face of that girl who had haunted me ever since our chance-meeting at Stockholm. It is odd that even in the presence of that new hope I felt a lingering, clinging sympathy with the waif that had cared for me, and done her best to shield and protect me, and nursed me like a real true sister.

After leaving the court, I went at once and called on Mr. Markby, and I found that he had just returned from Grosvenor Crescent.

‘This is a very serious matter,’ he said.

‘No doubt,’ I answered ; but I did not understand the real meaning of his words.

‘Poor Danescourt! I was saying to you the other day—last week, was it not?—that evil does not turn to good, and see what his wrong has led to.’

‘But I don't understand,’ I said, ‘how he came by his death. I have myself been suspected of causing his death, and have only now been released.’

'You? You? How on earth did they suspect you?'

'I will tell you that another time,' I answered; 'but at this instant I want to know how he met his death. Was it suicide?'

'Ah, that is more than I can say. Have you heard that his wife is suspected?'

'His wife? Impossible!'

'So I say; but the police have got it into their stupid heads.'

'Was it murder?' I asked.

'That is not certain, but it looks a little like it.'

'And the nurse?' I said.

'Ah! you know about that. Well, *I* would suspect her. Still there are circumstances which tell against Mrs. Danescourt; no doubt there are some. If it is murder, it has been cleverly planned.'

'How horrible! Does Mrs. Danescourt know that she is suspected?'

'I am afraid she does.'

'Then it will kill her, or wreck her mental health again.'

'I fear that, too,' he answered; 'but she bears up wonderfully. We must see what can be done to clear her at once. Have you leisure to help me in the matter?'

‘Leisure?’ I said, I am afraid foolishly. ‘I have a lifetime!’

I saw he smiled, but not unkindly.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DISCOVERY OF MY ANONYMOUS CORRESPONDENT—ABOUT NELLY VANE—APPARENTLY A HOPELESS TASK—SHE SENT ME A KIND WORD.

WHATEVER suspicions I had once entertained of Mr. Markby were not lodging in me now. I had possibly had some excuse for the doubts I had entertained, both of him and others; for too great credulity is an open door to imposture, and I had been far too trusting in the past to my cost as you know it. But Mr. Markby disarmed all suspicions. The way he worked in the cause, which was perhaps more at my heart than at his, was admirable; and when his exertions satisfied me, you may be certain he was indefatigable. I worked, too, but without coming into contact with Mrs. Danescourt. I now discovered, for the first time, that her Christian name was Alice, and, by comparing her writing with that of the letter that reached me at Stockholm, I found out that

it was she who had been my anonymous correspondent. What a big jump my heart gave when that truth came to me! Somehow I got to think of her, not as Mrs. Danescourt, but as Alice; and once even in speaking to Mr. Markby the name slipped out, whereat he again smiled a discreet smile, but said nothing. But I did not venture to intrude upon her at such a time. I was almost a stranger to her; I had only seen her—I can scarcely myself believe it—twice in my life. How could I approach her? That was the privilege of old friends, and I was almost jealous of the necessary intercourse which Mr. Markby had with her. But, although I could not see or speak with her, I could work for her, and I did.

It seemed as if fate meant me to be a detective, for I was always being cast for that *role* in life. I had been for weeks on the traces of a swindler and a Nihilist. When I returned I had to discover something about a man who had, I thought, planned my death—but *de mortuis*—and now I was on the track of another murderer. I had more interest in this search than in all my amateur sallies into the realms of detectivity. But I am the 'worst hand' at telling a story, all lovers are (if that is not bad grammar), for they are interested in

their own hearts, while other people are interested in something quite different. I forgot to tell you what had happened. A *post-mortem* examination had been made, and a chemist of experience had discovered that Mr. Danescourt had died from the effect of an irritant poison. But what was curious was, that he came to the conclusion that with the irritant poison a vegetable alkaloid had probably been mixed. So much we knew. But there was literally nothing to show by whom the poison had been administered. There was nothing in Mr. Danescourt's circumstances or surroundings which would have suggested the possibility of suicide. He had been at the office the day before, and seemed to be in his usual health. It is true—but the public did not know that—that the same day he had had an interview with Mr. Sorrenson; so he knew, I conclude, that I had returned unscathed. At first I made up my mind that he had committed suicide. I thought that he was afraid to meet me—that he was afraid to face the consequences of the discovery of the conspiracy which had been aimed at my life. But, unfortunately for my theory, one of the servants found a glass bottle concealed behind the paper-shavings in the drawing-room grate,

which she handed to Mr. Markby. That it had contained some medicine we could both say—but what? I went with the phial, which had no cork, and from which the druggist's label had been scraped—for there was a remnant of a label with two ornamental black lines upon it—to Mr. Stevens, the eminent chemist who had made the examination I have spoken of; and a day or two after, he wrote to me to say that the bottle I had found (that was the way he put it) had contained an irritant poison, I forget the name of, and aconite. He could be certain of that. He believed that it was the bottle which had contained the poison of which Mr. Danescourt died. I should, he advised, lose no time in bringing these circumstances to the notice of the police. I went and had a long talk with Mr. Markby, and we agreed that this, which was intended to be a piece of damning evidence against A——against Mrs. Danescourt, was really conclusive evidence against the nurse. You may not believe me, but this is the way we reasoned; or perhaps I should say I reasoned, but Mr. Markby agreed with me. We would both as soon have thought of accusing ourselves as of suspecting her. I know that I am taking all the interest out of my story

by this blunt confession ; in an orthodox tale we ought to have gone on suspecting her for three or four chapters at least, but then this is not an artistic novel, but a bald statement of facts and impressions as they occurred. It was somehow thus we argued. Had the phial been put in the grate for the purpose of concealment, a very bad place had been chosen. But had it been put there to be evidence against another, the place was well selected. The drawing-room was a place where Mrs. Danescourt was likely to be, but where the nurse would not be suspected of being. Besides, the removal of the label was suspicious. Anyone concealing it in a place where they thought it was effectually hidden would not have been at the pains to remove the label. But, on the other hand, suppose the nurse had purchased the poison, then the label would have been evidence against her. Now one thing remained to be done, and that was to find out where the bottle came from. Mr. Stevens had, at my request, left the corner of the label which still adhered to the bottle undisturbed. I clung hopefully to straws, as drowning men will. I had ascertained from the police, who really showed me great favor—I suppose because I had myself been erroneously suspected—

the whole history, so far as they knew it, of Nelly Vane—that was the name of the nurse who had fallen under my suspicion. Her history was a common one. She had been a woman of loose life, known as such to the police, but in no other way. She had, they told me, gone abroad—but that was no uncommon thing in such a life—some years before, and had only recently returned to this country. How Mr. Danescourt came to select her as a nurse for Mrs. Danescourt they did not know. If there had ever been any other relations between her and the dead man, they were not aware of the fact. Of course it was odd that he should have engaged such a woman to attend upon her; but, so far as they knew from the other servants, Miss Vane had come herself and solicited the situation. That was only a month or two ago. They knew nothing of her doings since she had been in Grosvenor Crescent. This was all they could tell me. That she had gone about a good deal ever since she had been in Mr. Danescourt's service was certain, so they inferred that she must have had many opportunities of procuring poison. The chemist with whom Mr. Danescourt usually dealt had not been applied to for any such medicine as that which caused his death.

They added, that she had no hospital experience, but that the servants said she made a good nurse. It was possible that Mr. Danescourt had known her long ago, but there was nothing to point to that in their relations since she had been in his house. Of course people would talk, but there was no truth in the gossip. Why she should want to take his life, they, the police, could not imagine. No, they didn't think she had done it. What motive could she have? That was their view of the case. I do not weary you with details, but I began my search for the druggist who had sold her the poison. You see I had made up my mind that she was guilty. I had one good reason for thinking her so, which was not known to the police. Mr. Markby had told me that he had had a conversation with Mrs. Danescourt as to her husband's death. She suspected no one; confessed she could not explain the death—threw no suspicion upon any person; did not believe that it was a case of suicide; but, while praising the nurse for many qualities, and assuring Mr. Markby that she was certain that there never had been any other relationship but that of master and servant between her husband and Nellie Vane, she added:

'I do not know how it is, but ever since the girl came into the house I have felt that she hated me.'

Was not that enough? It was enough to make me certain, and to make me work for weeks to bring home the guilt to that woman. It was apparently a hopeless task. What druggist could recognize such a phial even with the scrap of a label on it? and even if I did light on the man, would he confess it? I had very little hope—would have had none, had it not been for the fact that Mr. Markby told me he had found an opportunity of speaking to Mrs. Danescourt—to Alice—and had told her how I was working to help her, and she had sent me a kind word. I won't repeat that, but it was very dear to me. I heard Mr. Markby say, 'poor fellow!' I supposed the epithet was meant for me, but it was rather sympathy than pity.

CHAPTER XIV.

A VAGUE SUSPICION—TRYING TO FIND THE VENDER
OF POISON—MY THREE WEEKS' SEARCH—A
TURN OF LUCK.

I WAS at this work of inquiry late and early, day after day. I was at every druggist's shop that Nelly Vane could by any possibility have passed, between Grosvenor Crescent and the places where she ordinarily went. I had learned that she had been out some nights before Mr. Danescourt's death, and that she had said to Mrs. Danescourt, on her return, that it was a long way to Camden Town. At first I thought that this might be meant to throw people off the scent; but I came to the conclusion that I was crediting her with too much astuteness, so I went to Camden Town, and bothered every druggist there to say whether he recognized that bottle. Most of them laughed at me for my pains, and said that the bottle was like fifty others they sent out every day; but then, when we came to that precious bit of label, and compared their labels with the two black lines which were left on the phial, none of them corresponded. Oh,

what a weary thing such a hopeless search is! I would have tired of it in a day or two, had it not been for the thought of what depended on my possible discovery.

Little did I think then what my weary labors would result in. But who does, when he puts his hand to the plough, foresee what soil will be turned up? The remote issues of our acts are, after all, not in our hands, but in God's. Would to God I could have seen a little way into the future, and I would never—no, not for that love which was so dear to me—have undertaken that labor which was to have such dire consequences to one to whom I owed so much!

As yet the police had got no further than a vague suspicion of Mrs. Danescourt. They had been down at Weybridge—that I learned from Dr. Dowdeswell, interrogating him if he had ever seen any symptoms of homicidal mania in her. But hitherto they had been baffled; and they might go further, and rashly accuse her of the crime, as they had accused me. If they did that, I knew it would kill her; for I, too, had been with Dr. Dowdeswell, and had consulted him, and it was his opinion that any very strong emotion might again derange her faculties. I knew that there was little or no evidence against

her, but that did not console me ; for they had arrested me, and the evidence against me was trivial enough. Mrs. Danescourt had now left Grosvenor Crescent, and had gone down to her father's rectory in Sallowshire ; but I heard with indignation that she was watched by the police. It was to free her from this suspicion that I worked on perseveringly, anxiously trying to find the vender of the poison. Life, it seemed to me, depended on my discovery. As a fact, death did, but I did not see that then. I never said a word to her as to all the trouble I was taking for her dear sake, but I think Mr. Markby did. And about this time I received a letter from her ; it was the second letter I had had from her. I assure you, although I am a practical man, I thought all my trouble more than paid by these few lines. They seem common place thanks now ; but to me then—— But who does not know the significance of the insignificant, to a lover ?

I had been at my search for three weeks. I did not care whether I became the laughing-stock of chemists or not. I had a belief that I must succeed. Remember that I was not a fool all this while. Had any more hopeful inquiry suggested itself, I would have pursued it ; but nothing occurred to strengthen or direct

even police suspicion. Nellie Vane had left Grosvenor Crescent, of course. She, too, I was given to understand, was watched; but she went nowhere, did nothing, which threw any light on the mystery. It was strange that all this time I had never seen the subject of my suspicions. I had made up my mind that she was guilty, and I had made an image of her to my own mind, which enabled me to think about her. A woman who could hate Alice Danescourt must be repulsive. A woman who had led a dissolute life must be——But no; when I came there in my thought, I remembered one who had sinned, and who had yet been a guardian angel, a tender sister of charity to a poor, unfriended, fever-stricken man. Would to heaven, I say now, that I had gone and seen the woman that I was wronging in my thoughts! If I had, my story might have been a very different one.

It was, I remember, at the end of the third week of my search that Mr. Markby sent for me. During those three weeks I had a recurrence of the consciousness which I had experienced in Stockholm—that I was watched. How such impressions come to one I am not philosopher enough to determine. But when I became convinced of it, I am honest enough to

confess, it sent a thrill of fear all through me. At first I conjectured that even here in London assassins were on my track, believing me to be the dead man, Hare. Later, I suspected that it was in Nelly Vane's interest that I was dogged. It was to convict her that all my efforts were undertaken. It must be her interest to ascertain whether I was likely to light upon the discovery. But the espionage was difficult to detect. I tried harking back upon my course repeatedly. Once I came upon Alice Sergel, and would have spoken to her, had she not at the instant got into a hansom cab. I felt that it was possible that all my fears had been ungrounded, and that perhaps my steps were being fenced by a guardian angel; for love will make any woman, even such as she was, an angel.

But I was speaking of Mr. Markby.

'Well,' he said—of course he knew of all my weary work, and want of success—'well, you are going to have a turn of luck now.'

'How?' I said eagerly, for my whole mind was on that cursed label with its two black lines, and I felt angry that some other body should have made the discovery. I was jealous even of such a little service as that being done for her by another.

'You remember,' he went on, 'being a

candidate for the Secretaryship of the Explosives Insurance Company last summer—eh?’

‘Yes, very well,’ I said bitterly. ‘It was through my candidature for that that all my misfortunes came upon me.’

‘Well, they were not all misfortunes, were they?’ he said, smiling.

‘No, perhaps not.’ And my heart gave itself a hug.

‘Well,’ he went on, ‘a Mr. Shepherd got the appointment then; but there is a vacancy.’

‘What, is he dead?’ I asked.

‘No, he has got something else. But I heard of it two days ago, and went to some of the directors; and I think if you care for it you can have it. They know how you were jockeyed out of it before. What do you say?’

‘I cannot accept it now.’

‘Why not?’ he asked, surprised.

‘I have not found out who sold that poison.’

‘And you never will, my good fellow. But you don’t mean to say you will throw away such a chance as this?’

‘I will, indeed.’

‘Come, Darnell, don’t be a fool. If you force me to it, I will get orders from headquarters,’ and he smiled.

‘I am not yet satisfied,’ I said, ‘that my search

is useless. I have only been three weeks at it.'

'Three weeks! How long do you mean to give?'

'All my life, if necessary.'

'My good friend,' he said, but very kindly, 'you were once shut up in a lunatic asylum. Take care. You have done all that becomes a man; who does more is simply a—a policeman. Come, sit down here, and write your letter of application. I believe it is only a form. I think you are sure to get it.'

So at his request I sat down and wrote the letter. It seemed like Ararat coming up from the flood, my making an application again, so much had swamped and hidden my old life in these last full months. But, there I was, recalling my old phrases about 'zeal in discharging the duties devolving upon me,' and all the rest, and I began to think where my very tatterdemalion testimonials had gone to. But these, Mr. Markby told me, were unnecessary. My qualifications had been considered before. I need not canvass; I need only wait. While I waited, however, I was again on my beat, and I had three long days among the druggists before I heard that I was actually appointed. Ah! what pleasure that would have given me once! Now I had some pleasure, but it was like a faint

echo of the resonant delight which would have filled me had this happened to me in the spring. I suppose in these months I had grown to be a man. How much one has to leave behind one in ceasing to be a boy. I was sorry to be requested to enter on my duties as soon as possible, for I wanted still to pursue my search. As it turned out, however, my search was over.

Now, here, of course I see an obvious error in art, in telling the simple truth, and I am greatly tempted to invent a little, and say that at last I came on a druggist's label which corresponded with the two lines on the fragment on the phial ; that a page was missing from the druggist's day-book, and that that corresponded with the precise day upon which Nelly Vane had been to Camden Town. That, I know, would be the orthodox method of heightening the interest and of dealing with the difficulty. But, as I said before, I have no art of story-telling. I can only speak the plain, straightforward truth. The very day I got the letter informing me of my appointment, one of the chief inspectors waited on me, and when he was shown in said abruptly :

‘She’s gone, sir.’

‘Gone?’ I said, as well as a heart in my mouth would let me. ‘Who’s gone?’

‘She has, sir, slipped through our fingers. You must have been right from the first, sir.’

‘What?’ I cried, ‘do you mean that Nelly has run away?’

‘That’s it, sir. It’s a disgrace to the force, sir, although I say it. Gone and hasn’t left a trace as to her whereabouts. It is you that has done it, sir.’

‘I! What do you mean?’ I asked.

‘Well, sir, I mean this: I think, I’m sure, she must have heard about your going about with that bottle. You very likely went to the very shop that she got it at; of course the man wouldn’t say anything to you, but he tipped her the wink, don’t you see? and she’s off. We may catch her yet; but she is a sly one, and no mistake.’

‘Well, if it were only made certain that she did it,’ I said, ‘I would almost wish that the poor woman might escape.’

‘That would be another disgrace to the force, sir. But it’s certain she did it.’

‘How?’ I asked eagerly.

‘Well, sir, she has gone away; that’s a confession.’

I tried to think so, for if I could, the whole mystery which weighed on my life, and on that other life which was dearer than my own, would

have cleared away, and I would have seen the promise of a perfect day.

‘I’m sure she did it,’ he continued.

‘Thank God!’ I said.

‘Thank you, sir,’ said the inspector; but he was alluding to the wine, for he was setting down the empty glass.

I was not listening, but was persuading myself that perhaps the disappearance of the girl *was* a confession of her guilt, and that now I might rest from my labors. But the inspector was still speaking, and I dully heard what he said.

‘Ah, sir, no doubt you was right to suspect her—right all along, sir. But then, you see, you knew more about her than we did, at least until lately.’

‘I did? What do you mean? I never saw the woman in my life, and know nothing of her, except what you told me.’

‘Perhaps not under the name of Nellie Vane, sir; but we’ve been making inquiries, and we find that when she was abroad she wasn’t so harmlessly employed as we supposed. We know all about it now, though.’

‘What is it you mean?’ I asked, for somehow my intense interest was excited by his words.

‘Well, sir, you know about that man Hare?’

‘Hare?’ I cried.

‘Yes, sir; the poor young man that got mixed up with plots he didn’t want to have any hand in, through Mr. Danescourt, sir. Not that he was steady: he wasn’t, but he never put his hand to that plotting willingly. He was only the catspaw, sir. We found that out. And when Mr. Danescourt drew away his hand, the catspaw was left in the fire. It’s a bad story, sir. But you know all about that, for you went out on purpose to find him.’

‘Is it possible?’ I said, as the black vista opened before me, and as I had a consciousness of more horrible depths which were behind. ‘But what has all this to do with Nellie Vane?’ I asked.

‘You’ll soon see, sir. Why it is as clear as noonday now—the motive and all, and just when it was made certain here she has slipped through our fingers. It’s a disgrace to the force, sir—a disgrace to the force.’

‘Go on,’ I said impatiently, for I felt as if there was some calamitous information which he was keeping from me. My presentiment was right.

‘Well, sir, Hare was fond of that girl——’

‘Fond of Nellie Vane?’

‘Yes, sir, and she was fond of him. Now,

don't you see the whole thing, sir? Revenge, that's the motive; and we can't say that Mr. Danescourt didn't deserve his death, at least I can't, although I am an officer of the law.'

'When, where did they meet, or know each other?' I asked, and my breath came in painful pants.

'In Stockholm, sir. She wasn't called Nellie Vane there, but Alice Sergel.'

'Alice Sergel!' I cried, jumping up.

'Ah, I thought you knew about her, sir. Well, I believe that it was your inquiries, sir, that drove her away, for she couldn't have heard of the investigation we were making.'

'Good heavens!' I cried, 'you do not mean to say that it was Alice Sergel who——'

'Well, sir, that's about what I do say.'

I do not know when he left me. I was dazed by the news, horrified to think it possible that such a woman could have been guilty of such a crime, horrified to think that I had, all these weeks, been hunting down a woman who had loved me, who had guarded me, who had saved my life. But was it possible? Was it not at least possible that she had upbraided Danescourt with his conduct, and that he had made away with himself? Nay, was it not also possible that she, if she aimed at any life, had aimed at that of

Alice Danescourt? She knew, she must know, that I loved her—loved Alice Danescourt. She had been with me during my fever. She must have heard me confess a hundred times. Was she jealous, and had she planned her death, and had the husband fallen into the trap by misadventure? These thoughts occurred to me in flashes. But they were all questions, and no answer could be found to them. And now I had hunted her, had driven her away. She must have known that I was on her track. She had been watching me. It was that that had revived in me the old impression that I was being dogged and watched. What must she have thought of me? Was this the gratitude I had been burning to express to her? Still I would do so yet. I would find her out; I would make amends. But what if it was true that she had murdered Danescourt? That was the horrible thought. I could not believe it. Might not the police find her? Might she not be brought to justice, and—and—I shuddered when I thought thus, and remembered her healing presence at the time of my illness, when I could see out of the furnace of my dreams. Poor Alice Sergel!

CHAPTER XV.

A WORSHIPER OF GOTHIC—ALICE DANESCOURT—IT
WAS THEN I FIRST TALKED OF LOVE, AND NOT
IN VAIN—THE MYSTERY SOLVED.

I WAS soon hard at work as Secretary to the Insurance Company. At first the regular hours and the routine labors irked me a little ; but after a time I began to like the treadmill business existence. But all this while my life was haunted by thoughts of Alice Sergel. Had I had leisure, I would have gone to seek her, but that was now out of the question. Besides, I still heard from the police that they were in search of her ; but it was a search which—it may be criminal to have felt, but I did feel, pleased—was unsuccessful. Still I dreaded always to hear that they were upon her track. I prayed that they might never find her. But although I thought thus, and all my love was set elsewhere, still I had a soft place in my heart for that girl. It was now a cold January, without ice. Winds which were meanly cold came from the east. The sun had scarcely been seen for a fortnight. It was Sunday, and after lunch I went out for a walk. It was not easy to keep one's

self warm in the house, so I went to walk myself into a glow. I did—but of another sort. I found myself at about ten minutes to three close to Westminster Abbey, and, going round by the Chapter House, I went in. I am ashamed to say that I believe it was my love for architecture that took me into the fine old church. I am a worshiper of Gothic, and I have had more real sermons preached to me by churches themselves than were ever preached in them. I went under the fine flying buttress which belongs to the Chapter House, and in by the Poets' Corner door; and going a little way forward, I sat down. I have often done it before and since, and allowed the solemn lessons of the great church to be written in *chiar-oscuro* on my heart. I had not been seated long, when the choir began to sing. Then came the sermon: I did not hear much of it, for the reverend gentleman had a weak voice, and to occupy myself I looked at some of the monuments. To my left hand, high up, was Garrick, opening the curtains, while Tragedy and Comedy sat for footlights. Then my eyes fell on the bust of Grote, and there, below it, was a face—Good heavens! it was Alice Danescourt! After that, the sermon came to an end, and then I went toward her. She was in deep mourning; but she was

quite calm, and must have seen me long before I saw her. There was a faint blush on her pale cheek, as she held out her hand to me. The glow had come.

There is very little more to tell. The coy spring was yielding her sweet charms. The birds were mating, and singing their love and happiness on every tree. It was then that I first talked of love to Alice Danescourt, in a quiet, loitering lane near her father's parsonage. I talked—and not in vain. Her love had been waiting for me. It was when the hot prime of the year had gone, when autumn was passing gently away, and when winter was beginning to show its fangs of frost of a morning, that we two were married very quietly at her father's little church; and the bells rang merrily, and yet soberly enough. There were very few guests there. The Markbys and Miss Stewart, of course, one or two relations, and that was all—no, not all. As we went from the little church to the parsonage, through the quiet green grass, and under the trees, which held out leafy hands in blessings over the quiet dead, I saw standing beneath a tree, close to the path, the pale, sorrowful face of Alice Sergel. I took my wife into the house, and then returned to

seek for the girl, but she had gone. Poor Alice! I never saw her again—but once.

We were returning from our honeymoon through Paris. My wife desired to call and see the woman in whose house I had lain so long ill, and I went the day before to see her, and arrange for the visit. She was much flattered by the promised call, and asked tenderly and admiringly for my sister—poor Alice! As I was returning to the hotel, I passed the Morgue, and I was irresistibly tempted to go in there once again. So much had happened since I was there before. I went straight to where Hare had been laid, and where I myself had fallen, and there—there!—lay, on the same cold slab, Alice Sergel! I had to lean against the wall that I might not again swoon where I had fallen before. That was the last time I saw Alice Sergel. The next day she was buried quietly, as if she had been—as in a sense she was—my sister, in a grave beside which both my wife and I shed tears.

That grave is marked now by a little stone, bearing her name, and the explanation that it was erected by 'her brother.'



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